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Technicolor in Britain

TV on the brain

Fitz and Tennison ten years on

Screen

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cover illustration

Elvira (Kay Hammond) and Ruth
(Constance Cummings) in *Blithe Spirit*
(David Lean, 1945).

SARAH STREET: 'Colour consciousness': Natalie Kalmus and Technicolor in Britain **191**

AMELIE HASTIE: TV on the brain **216**

HELEN PIPER: 'How long since you were last alive?' Fitz and Tennison ten years on **233**

REVIEWS

SHOHINI CHAUDHURI: Abé Mark Nornes, *Cinema Babel: Translating Global Cinema* **251**

CATHERINE JOHNSON: Paul Grainge, *Brand Hollywood: Selling Entertainment in a Global Media Age* **254**

ELENI LIAROU: Helen Wheatley (ed.), *Re-viewing Television History: Critical Issues in Television Historiography* **257**

ANGELA McROBBIE: Lawrence A. Rickels, *Ulrike Ottinger: the Autobiography of Art Cinema* **260**

BRETT MILLS: Andy Medhurst, *A National Joke: Popular Comedy and English Cultural Identities* **263**

C. PAUL SELLORS: Kathryn H. Fuller-Seeley (ed.), *Hollywood in the Neighborhood: Historical Case Studies of Local Moviegoing*; Paul S. Moore, *Now Playing: Early Moviegoing and the Regulation of Fun* **266**

ELKE WEISSMANN: Barbara J. Selznick, *Global Television: Co-Producing Culture* (Emerging Media: History, Theory, Narrative Series) **270**

CONTRIBUTORS 273

NOTES TO CONTRIBUTORS 275

'Colour consciousness': Natalie Kalmus and Technicolor in Britain

SARAH STREET

1 Shirley R. Simpson, 'A plea for natural colour', *Kinematograph Weekly*, 26 August 1937, p. 4; and *Today's Cinema*, 1 May 1935, Construction and Equipment supplement, p. iii.

2 Contemporary studies include Adrian Bernard Klein, *Colour Cinematography* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1936, 1939 and 1951 editions); John Huntley, *British Technicolor Films* (London: Skelton Robinson, 1949). Colour features in key studies by Steve Neale, *Cinema and Technology: Image, Sound, Colour* (London: Macmillan, 1985); Tom Gunning, 'Colorful metaphors: the attraction of color in early silent cinema', *Fotogenia*, no. 1 (1994), pp. 249–55; Daan Hertogs and Nico De Klerk (eds), *'Disorderly Order': Colours in Silent Film* (Amsterdam: Stichting Nederlands Filmmuseum, 1996). For reprints of key texts on colour, see Angela Dalle Vacche and Brian Price (eds), *Color: the Film Reader* (London: Routledge, 2006). Recent work includes Erik Hanssen, *Early Discourses on Colour and Cinema: Origins, Functions, Meanings* (Stockholm: Stockholm University Press, 2006); Scott Higgins, *Harnessing the Technicolor Rainbow: Color Design in the 1930s* (Austin, TX: Texas University Press, 2007).

When Technicolor was first seen in British cinemas it met with a wave of contradictory opinion, ranging from the perplexed complaint that 'with the screen a blazing riot of colour it is impossible to concentrate fully on any particular individual' to the claim that 'black-and-white films will soon be a thing of the past'.¹ Modes of contemporary discourse around colour frequently discussed its impact on the audience who, it was feared, might be distracted by its spectacular appearance in the context of narrative cinema. For many directors, cinematographers and art directors, however, choosing to use colour demonstrated its fascination as a symbolic register, as a device to support narrative and as expressive technique. This essay discusses the arrival of Technicolor in Britain and the impact it had on prevailing practices as well as on aesthetic regimes. Films which demonstrate notable, varied and on occasion remarkable uses of Technicolor – *Wings of the Morning* (Harold D. Schuster, 1937), *The Thief of Bagdad* (Ludwig Berger et al., 1940) and *Black Narcissus* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, 1947) – will serve as case studies to demonstrate how concentrating on colour invites a combination of analytical and theoretical perspectives that reveal the complex challenges it poses to film scholarship. While colour has received some attention in contemporary commentary, histories of film technology, film theory and criticism, this has by no means formed an extensive corpus; this essay is intended to contribute to the renewed interest in colour over the past few years.²

After experimentation in the USA, Technicolor was introduced in 1932 as a 'three-colour' (red, green, blue) subtractive process whereby a beam-splitter behind the camera's lens reflected light via filters onto

3 For full technical details of Technicolor, see Leo Enticknap, *Moving Image Technology from Zoetrope to Digital* (London: Wallflower, 2005), pp. 87–8.

4 See the list of British Technicolor films at the end of this essay.

5 See Higgins, *Harnessing the Technicolor Rainbow*, pp. 39–47.

6 *Technicolor News and Views*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1939), p. 3. For details of the color consultancy service, see Natalie Kalmus collection, 2 f.29. Technicolor Control Department, 1938–44, Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles.

three negatives. Through a printing technique known as imbibition and dye transfer, a single print was then produced that did not require a special projector for exhibition.³ The ‘three-strip’ technology overcame many of the technical problems that had bedevilled previous colour systems and became dominant in the USA and Britain for the next twenty years or so. Although the majority of British films were made in black-and-white, once Technicolor was introduced in the mid 1930s it became by far the most widely used colour process until the mid 1950s. Filming in Technicolor was expensive, but it was used in Britain for key films including *Wings of the Morning*, *The Drum* (Zoltan Korda, 1938), *Sixty Glorious Years* (Herbert Wilcox, 1938), *The Four Feathers* (Zoltan Korda, 1939), *The Thief of Bagdad*, *Henry V* (Laurence Olivier, 1944), *Western Approaches* (Pat Jackson, 1944), *Caesar and Cleopatra* (Gabriel Pascal, 1945), *A Matter of Life and Death* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, 1946), *Black Narcissus*, *Scott of the Antarctic* (Charles Frend, 1948), *The Red Shoes* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, 1948), *Moulin Rouge* (John Huston, 1952) and *The Ladykillers* (Alexander Mackendrick, 1955). It was also used for short and informational films, but the concentration here will be on fiction feature films.⁴

When Technicolor was exported to Britain, the application of the process was overseen by Natalie Kalmus, ex-wife of Technicolor’s co-developer Herbert Kalmus. In her role as head of the Color Advisory Service, Natalie Kalmus was credited as ‘color consultant’ on most Technicolor films from 1933 to 1949. While she often worked alongside others and delegated responsibilities, there is no doubt that she exercised a profound influence over the ways in which Technicolor was used for many years.⁵ Crucially, she developed guidelines for the process, advocating a theory of ‘color consciousness’ through the use of charts for each film, which operated like a musical score and linked colour intensity with dominant moods or emotions. A chart was produced after reading a script; consultations would take place with producers and members of a studio’s art and costume departments, and further adjustments would be made on the set and in post-production. As the company explained, the function of the colour consultancy service was to ‘offer suggestions where color enhances dramatic mood and story value. Under Mrs Kalmus’s direction, Technicolor has tested literally thousands of fabrics and color combinations and this information is made available to producers.’⁶ Many British cinematographers recall that Kalmus could be obstructive when they wanted to experiment with colour, and some commentators, including Martin Scorsese, credit cinematographers such as Jack Cardiff with developing a British use of Technicolor that was distinct from its application in the USA. As I shall show, there were indeed very distinctive uses of colour, but these need to be understood in relation to overall developments in colour cinematography. Art directors, too, functioned as key production personnel who would negotiate the details of working with colour in collaboration with Kalmus and her

colleague Joan Bridge (who was also credited as colour director on many British films). While many contemporary commentators claimed to see an aesthetic uniqueness in the ways in which Technicolor was used in British films, it is clear that this was just one aspect of a wider nationalist discourse that claimed differentiation from Hollywood. I argue that the issue is not simply a question of identifying differences between British and Hollywood Technicolor, but involves understanding the negotiation of convention and innovation that faced both cinemas. When British filmmakers used Technicolor they did so in the knowledge that although the process involved conforming to a particular set of technical conventions, it simultaneously provided scope for experimentation.

From the first instances of the application of colour in silent cinema via various manual, mechanical and photographic processes, commentators were fascinated by its impact on audiences, particularly the disruptive aesthetic potential of its sensual, synaesthetic effects.⁷ The development of Technicolor was equally subject to concerns about controlling the impact of colour in order to make it acceptable to an industry that had based the majority of its mainstream aesthetic norms on the principles of supporting classical narrative. In keeping with this general approach, while still allowing for a degree of experimentation with colour, Natalie Kalmus developed her theory of 'color consciousness' to guide the work of the Technicolor consultancy service. This theory was first published in 1935 and reflected an art-historical/painterly approach in which 'The design and colors of sets, costumes, drapes, and furnishings must be planned and selected just as an artist would choose the colors from his palette and apply them to the proper portions of his painting'.⁸ For Kalmus, colour appreciation and study was key to the judicious use of colour in motion pictures. There was a perceptible utopianism to her ideas, arguing as she did that film was an opportunity to unite music, graphic art and acting in 'one expression of more ultimate art'. Yet her desire to effect a degree of control over colour did not really encourage this broader aim. In fact, the role of colour as a unifying, 'organic' property was a more central feature in the writings of theorists such as Eisenstein. Kalmus, however, steered a course which celebrated colour but warned against its excessive demonstration: 'A super-abundance of color is unnatural, and has a most unpleasant effect not only upon the eye itself, but upon the mind as well. On the other hand, the complete absence of color is unnatural.'⁹ She elaborated upon these general ideas with particular systemic codes, arguing that colours and neutrals augment one another and that the psychology of colour is very important. Drawing on traditional colour theories, she proposed that a mood could be 'keyed' by colour, making the audience more receptive to an emotion. She demarcated 'warm' colours (red, orange, yellow – indicating excitement, activity and heat) from 'cool' ones (green, blue, violet – associated with retiring, rest, ease, coolness). The addition of white, Kalmus believed, could have interesting consequences, indicating youth, gaiety and informality. Grey, on the other hand, introduced

7 Joshua Yumibe, 'Moving color: an aesthetic history of applied color technologies in silent cinema' (PhD thesis: University of Chicago, 2007).

8 Natalie Kalmus, 'Color consciousness', *Journal of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers*, August 1935, reprinted in Dalle Vacche and Price (eds), *Color: the Film Reader*, p. 24.

9 Ibid., p. 25.

10 Albert Munsell, *A Color Notation*, 7th edn (Baltimore: Hoffman Brothers, 1926), pp. 18–31, quoted in Higgins, *Harnessing the Technicolor Rainbow*, p. 15.

11 Kalmus, 'Color consciousness', p. 28.

12 Ibid., p. 29.

13 Duncan Petrie, *The British Cinematographer* (London: British Film Institute, 1996), pp. 42–5.

subtlety, refinement and charm, while black added strength but could also be considered to introduce a 'baser' look. Her views were founded on the influential Munsell system, first published in 1921, in which colour is characterized by hue, value and chroma (saturation). Hue is the everyday colour name and its lightness or darkness is its value (high for lighter; low for darker), while saturation refers to the intensity of a colour, which is usually weakened by the addition of grey.¹⁰ Colours such as green were associated in Kalmus's scheme with nature and the outdoors; violet, indigo and blue were considered to be 'quiet' colours associated with tranquillity and passivity. In accordance with these tenets, Kalmus prepared colour charts that were the foundation of a film's colour design. She explained: 'The preparation of this chart calls for careful and judicious methods, but through application of the rules of art and the physical laws of light and color in relation to literary laws and story values'.¹¹

Any analysis of Technicolor must acknowledge Kalmus's broad principles of 'color consciousness', since they can be seen to operate at a textual level and indeed go some way to revealing how colour scoring guides the viewer to an understanding of the dynamics of a particular dramatic situation. Kalmus's expertise was in the area of costume design and she believed that costume colours should be associated with character; particularly that of the lead female performer, whose costume colour was often repeated in flowers within a particular scene. The 'color consciousness' scheme emphasized how colour separation was an important factor in design, whereby different hues were placed beside each other. In addition, the 'Law of Emphasis' stated that 'nothing of relative unimportance in a picture shall be emphasized', which implied that colour was not supposed to draw attention to itself; but it did play a role in making actors stand out from interesting and varied sets that were not 'flat'. To achieve this aim, colour was used in a similar way to lighting, which could create the impression of depth in black-and-white cinematography. Colour complements and juxtapositions – orange/blue, for example – were another strategy favoured by Kalmus, who demonstrated how the placing of two such colours together resulted in the first emphasizing in the second the characteristics that it itself lacked – 'The orange will appear more red than it really is' – so that hue is changed when different colours are placed one over the other or side by side.¹² Kalmus's guidelines were supported by rigorous technical rules which demanded, for example, high-key light levels made possible by the use of arc lamps, and a very low contrast ratio, particularly in areas of shadow which required extra care to avoid distortion of colour by under-exposure.¹³ Processing in the lab was also strictly controlled in order to achieve the 'correct look' for Technicolor. The number of available Technicolor cameras in Britain in 1937 was just four, and the large, cumbersome and heavy 'blimp' that was necessary to reduce noise made it difficult to plan complex tracking movements with soundtrack.

While Kalmus's interventions at the level of production are fundamental in assessing the use of colour in the specific context of Technicolor, it is important to recognize that analyses must draw on a more extensive conceptual register if we are fully to appreciate colour's ability to exceed the requirements of story or to achieve a balanced graphic composition. Colour is a complex register and subject to many variables in application as well as in reception. The latter is a fascinating area which demonstrates that an understanding of the meanings associated with colour relates not only to narrative norms but also to cultural context. As David Batchelor has observed: 'The rainbow is a universally observable and consistent natural phenomenon, and yet its representations, both verbal and visual, are strikingly inconsistent. Rainbows are always seen through the prism of a culture; they are marked by the habits of language or the conventions of painting.'¹⁴

Other theorists have similarly taken an approach less tied to the immediate concerns of narrative or to the proposition that the relation between colour and object is fixed. As Hanssen has argued: 'Colour in cinema is characterized by a tension and alternation between autonomy and integration, independence and connection. Colours can be imagined independently, and without borders, but can only be perceived and exist within a context; colour always represents a "matter of relationships"'.¹⁵ Eisenstein, for example, theorized colour as part of a holistic but mutable system, although his theoretical writings became more explicit about the specific correspondences between colour and sound in relation to his conception of film montage. Eisenstein was concerned with how colour evades fixity of meaning, and emphasized instead how context can alter the association of colour quite markedly. As he observed:

In art it is not the *absolute* relationships that are decisive, but those *arbitrary* relationships within a system of images dictated by the particular work of art. The problem is not, nor ever will be, solved by a fixed catalogue of colour-symbols, but *the emotional intelligibility and function of colour will rise from the natural order of establishing the colour imagery of the work, coincidental with the process of shaping the living movement of the whole work*.¹⁶

While acknowledging that certain cultural associations are resonant with particular colours, when placed within a particular narrative context, or as a contrapuntal discourse, colour can become disassociated from object. The sign-meaning connection is thus disrupted, often creating a new association between a particular colour and the object in question. As I shall show, this is a feature of some notable usages of Technicolor in which application was guided by particular, often shifting, meaning within the context of a narrative. Related to these questions of the inherent instability of meaning represented by colour is the mixed response with which its appearance in film was greeted, not least from the industry.

¹⁴ David Batchelor, *Chromophobia* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), pp. 93–4.

¹⁵ Hanssen, *Early Discourses on Colour and Cinema*, p. 179.

¹⁶ Sergei Eisenstein, *The Film Sense* (1942), trans. Jay Leyda (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), pp. 120–21, italics in original. For an analysis of Eisenstein's writings on colour, see Eirik Hanssen, 'Eisenstein in colour', *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift*, vol. 73, no. 4 (2004), pp. 212–27.

17 Sarah Street, *Transatlantic Crossings: British Feature Films in the USA* (New York, NY and London: Continuum, 2002).

18 *Today's Cinema*, 23 September 1935, p. 1; Margaret Dickinson and Sarah Street, *Cinema and State: the Film Industry and the British Government, 1927–84* (London: British Film Institute, 1985), p. 82. The Hillman process was abandoned in favour of creating links with Technicolor.

19 *Today's Cinema*, 1 May 1935, Construction and Equipment section, p. iii.

20 *Today's Cinema*, 10 July 1935, p. 13.

Colour was not universally welcomed in terms of either economics or style. Although the appearance of Technicolor during a period when colour on screen was unusual invested it with an element of novelty which at times was emphasized by the industry, on other occasions it was not privileged. As the British film industry sought to establish a firm economic base from which to develop its own export strategies, relations with Hollywood included coproductions, star trading and the transfer of technological processes.¹⁷ During the early-to-mid 1930s, when Technicolor was trying to establish itself as the leading commercial three-colour subtractive process in the USA, Herbert Kalmus was keen to export it to Britain. The manner of this exportation was tied to the ways in which the company sought to retain control over its application; colour control was therefore an economic as well as an aesthetic strategy. Equipment was never sold outright; instead, the cameras were rented out to companies that wanted to use them, and it was compulsory for Technicolor's consulting service to be used as part of the contract.

Natalie Kalmus accompanied the process to Britain in April 1936, when *Wings of the Morning*, the first British feature film to use Technicolor, was shot at Denham Studios and on location in Ireland and on the Epsom Downs. The link between Technicolor and Denham was forged because London Film Productions (LFP), the company directed by Alexander Korda, had been interested in colour from the early 1930s. Indeed, LFP's major financial backer, the Prudential Assurance Company, had been persuaded to invest in films on the promise of developing the 'Hillman colour process' owned by Colourgravure Ltd, a subsidiary of Gerrard Industries, a box-making company that subsequently became involved with British Technicolor.¹⁸ There were many attempts to develop this and other processes in the 1920s and 1930s, such as Dufaycolor, Raycol, Spectracolor and Gasparcolor, and the film trade papers of this period are full of discussions of each process's technical strengths and weaknesses. The coming of sound had totally revolutionized the film industry, and now discussions of colour fixated on the extent to which its widespread adoption might have a similar effect. In May 1935 there was a debate in *Today's Cinema* on the likelihood of colour's widespread usage, despite its considerable cost: 'If ordinary films in colour should prove as great an improvement on black-and-white as cartoons in colour have done, then black-and-white films will soon be a thing of the past'.¹⁹ Indeed, Technicolor's success with Disney cartoons, and perfection of the three-colour process in feature films, such as *Becky Sharp* (Rouben Mamoulian, 1935), made an impression in the UK. The reviewer in *Today's Cinema*, for example, wrote: 'Words fail adequately to describe the stereoscopic effect that colour has given to many of the scenes while yet escaping in some miraculous fashion all sense of the tawdry theatrical'.²⁰ After the press screening it was declared a triumph by the trade paper under the headline 'Another Revolution?'. The leader article asserted: 'Blotchiness, fringing, tonal inconsistency, were quite absent. . . . Three-colour

21 Ibid., p. 1.

Technicolor may be capable of improvement, but even at its present stage it is definitely ready.²¹ What is notable about these contemporary comments is that Technicolor was considered acceptable only once the process was perceived as having overcome such flaws as ‘blotchiness’ or ‘tonal inconsistency’ that drew attention to colour – a judgement in keeping with the notion that colour must not be aberrant. Links were formed with Technicolor only once the US company appeared to have overcome some of the technical problems, such as the failure to achieve ‘correct’ or ‘natural’ tones, considered likely to distract audiences from being totally drawn into the fictional world on screen.

Even so, the industry was still not totally won over, and debates continued as to whether colour was worth the extra costs incurred by producers and, with some additive processes, by exhibitors who would need special projection equipment. When Sidney Bernstein added a question about colour to his questionnaire for cinema audiences in 1937 (‘Do you like coloured feature talkies?’), 62% were in favour of colour film. Ten years later the increased popularity of colour film resulted in 80% of people saying that colour was a reason for going to a film (3% said colour was a reason for staying away, and 17% did not know either way).²² In the 1930s, however, the aesthetic effects were also a cause of ambivalence, with many reviewers of colour films insisting that successful colour was merely an aid to storytelling and not a spectacular property in itself. In this vein, one *Picturegoer* reader complained that the colour effects in the two-strip Technicolor film *Ring Up the Curtain* (US title *Broadway to Hollywood*, Willard Mack, 1933), were ‘introduced in rather haphazard fashion and, consequently, break the continuity of the film. This fault must be avoided.’²³ Comments such as this were in keeping with Natalie Kalmus’s strictures, since her designs for three-strip colour films used colour in such a way as to make it distinctive but not distracting. As Scott Higgins has shown, however, in the early years of three-colour Technicolor development in the USA, the ‘demonstration mode’ prevailed. In this system, colour was used to create a spectacular impact and in some cases, such as the two-reel *La Cucaracha* (Lloyd Corrigan, 1934) and full-length feature *Becky Sharp*, it departed from being tied strictly to narrative development. As Higgins observes, both films ‘employ color in particularly forceful ways, displaying the processes’s chromatic range and drawing attention to its potential for underscoring drama. They are films inspired by a fleeting belief that color would usher in a bold new form of cinema.’²⁴ As the process became less of a novelty it was to a certain extent ‘reined in’ to create a more restrained aesthetic approach that favoured tone and value rather than contrast of hue, a way of encouraging the film industry to appreciate that its use did not represent a break with classical style.²⁵

In Britain producer John Maxwell was similarly cautious, arguing that colour was ‘an embellishment’ that would be used when ‘perfected’ and only then ‘on appropriate occasions’.²⁶ This is hardly surprising considering Maxwell’s reputation for taking an economical approach to

22 Bernstein questionnaires, 1937 and 1946–47, British Film Institute Library.

23 *Picturegoer*, vol. 3, no. 146, 10 March 1934, p. 42.

24 Higgins, *Harnessing the Technicolor Rainbow*, p. 19.

25 Scott Higgins, ‘Demonstrating three-color Technicolor: early three-color aesthetics and design’, *Film History*, vol. 12, no. 4 (2000), pp. 358–83. See also Higgins, *Harnessing the Technicolor Rainbow*.

26 *Today’s Cinema*, 4 September 1935, Construction and Equipment section, p. iv.

production at British International Pictures, especially when compared to Korda's association with bigger-budget films. The reviewer for *Picturegoer* who saw *La Cucaracha* had a mixed response to the film, commenting that 'I have never seen better blues nor more artistic pearl greys', but 'one still feels a sense that it is not natural. Facial colours are prone to be too ruddily yellow and the feast of colour is far too wholesale.' The desire for a 'natural' rendition of colour was frequently expressed in reviews, the same writer noting that when Technicolor was introduced into a feature-length film it should be throughout, not just in sequences, since 'I know of nothing more annoying than being switched from black-and-white to colour and back again; the effect is to engender a wholly artificial atmosphere'.²⁷ There were also concerns that watching colour films might be bad for people, with some commentators claiming that in dark auditoria bright colours would give audiences headaches as well as causing an unnecessary distraction from the action of a film.²⁸ In the case of replicating blood in war films, another objection was raised that 'only a few could stand it [the scenes in colour], not the majority'.²⁹ Such comments are indicative of the confusion caused by the possibility of a widespread use of colour, and betray fears about its disruptive potential. Yet this potential could not be easily dismissed, since the novelty value of colour, with its claims to deliver both heightened realism and spectacular fantasy, promised to place producers ahead of the technological game. And its fascination for contemporary audiences was exemplified by one of J.P. Mayer's respondents to his request in *Picturegoer* for 'motion picture autobiographies': 'When I've been to a film [especially one in Technicolor] I always walk home feeling disgusted with the drab town I live in, the paint-work of doors etc seem awfully dull and dresses look plain after seeing the glorious scenery and stylish clothes in the film'.³⁰

This attitude was prevalent in the reception given to the three-strip process in Britain by one of its leading producers, Alexander Korda. In the 1930s Herbert Kalmus made several visits to the UK, while British financier Sir Adrian Baillie went to Hollywood to see the Technicolor laboratories and the completion of *Becky Sharp*.³¹ Technicolor Ltd was established in 1935 under the direction of Kay Harrison of Gerrard Industries, a company which had become interested in film investment through its connection with Korda's London Film Productions.³² Over the next two decades Technicolor Ltd showed an increase in production year on year, with the exception of 1940 when it was affected by the outbreak of war. In its first full year of operations, the company produced and sold 13.5 million feet of film; in the year ended 1955 this figure had risen to 209.5 million.³³ The first primary shareholders of the company were Herbert Kalmus, the solicitor St George Syms, and Harrison. Both the Prudential and Technicolor financed the erection of modern plant, opened in January 1937, that was designed to develop the process in the UK.³⁴ Soon after the formation of Technicolor Ltd, a party of key personnel was sent to Hollywood to study the technical specifications and

27 *Picturegoer*, vol. 4, no. 175, 29 September 1934, p. 5.

28 See report of an address by Dr Spencer to the Royal Photographic Society in *Kinematograph Weekly*, 4 March 1937, p. 46.

29 'When colour comes', *Kinematograph Weekly*, 7 October 1937, p. 4.

30 J.P. Mayer, *British Cinemas and their Audiences* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1948), p. 42.

31 *Today's Cinema*, 28 May 1935, p. 1.

32 *Today's Cinema*, 25 July 1935, p. 3.

33 *Financial Times*, 19 March 1956.

34 Huntley, *British Technicolor Films*, p. 18.

³⁵ *Today's Cinema*, 24 September 1935, p. 1.

³⁶ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 7 May 1936, p. 14.

³⁷ See, for example, an article by Kalmus which quotes her 'color consciousness' ideas in *The Cinema*, Construction and Equipment section, 2 January 1936, p. xxix.

³⁸ *The Cinema*, Onlooker section, 30 April 1936, p. 1.

³⁹ Kalmus was declared 'Technicolor's first star!', and 'one of the most romantic figures of the day', in *Photoplay*, vol. 37, no. 5 (1930), p. 67.

⁴⁰ Natalie Kalmus papers, 1-f.7, Ray Dannenbaum. The file has details of an article written by Dannenbaum that was published under Kalmus's name in *Popular Photography*, 25 September 1942.

⁴¹ Although they were divorced this was not public knowledge until 1948, when Natalie filed a lawsuit against Herbert for a monetary settlement. See Herbert T. Kalmus with Eleanore King Kalmus, *Mr Technicolor* (Chesterfield, NJ: MagicImage Film Books, 1993 for a far from impartial history).

⁴² Jack Cardiff, in Justin Bowyer, *Conversations with Jack Cardiff* (London: Batsford, 2003), p. 42.

operation of the laboratories.³⁵ In March 1936 reports were published of the first Technicolor film to be made in the UK, which coincided with plans to build the Technicolor laboratory on the Great West Road, Harmondsworth, Middlesex. A month later Natalie Kalmus arrived in London to supervise the use of the process in this production. She confidently predicted that in two years every major feature film would be made in colour.³⁶ That her 'color consciousness' article received widespread coverage in Britain demonstrated the extent to which her guidelines were common currency during this period.³⁷ She was generally regarded as the Technicolor expert who also knew about art, a combination which attracted a degree of curiosity that was at least in part due to her gender, as one trade press commentator reported after interviewing her: 'Mrs Kalmus I found a most delightful and enlightened character. . . . Indeed I'd like to see her in Technicolor herself for she's by no means a flat personality. It is clear that she has the technical side of the game at her fingertips and can be depended on not only to look after that angle but the creative colour angle as well.'³⁸ This kind of reportage continued throughout her career and Technicolor clearly took advantage of her 'star' value as an ambassador for the process who, as a woman heading a complex and key operation in the company's development, was in a fairly unusual position.³⁹ It suited Technicolor to exploit this interest by publicizing her technical knowledge, on one occasion putting her name to an article written by a male colleague in the company.⁴⁰ Her work attracted widespread coverage in fan magazines and she encouraged tie-ins between Technicolor and department stores by advising on colour combinations for new fashion ranges, as well as giving radio interviews. While not my focus here, her relationship with Herbert Kalmus, their secret divorce in 1921 and a bitter lawsuit in 1948 add to her reputation as a fascinating and mysterious figure in film history.⁴¹

Wings of the Morning was chosen, like other early showcase Technicolor films, for the colour potential of its location and settings. It tells the story of Marie (Annabella), daughter of an Irish gypsy king, who in the late nineteenth century marries Lord Clontarf, a nobleman who is subsequently killed in a riding accident. Marie believes that a curse has been put on her descendants and it is fifty years before she returns to Ireland, taking with her *Wings*, a horse she hopes will be good enough to win the Derby. She is joined by her great-granddaughter Maria (also played by Annabella), who has escaped from a revolution in Spain disguised as a boy. While in her male attire Maria meets Kerry (Henry Fonda), a Canadian horse trainer who, after Maria's disguise is discovered and they have fallen in love, agrees to train *Wings*. In an extended final sequence, *Wings* wins the Derby and the curse on Marie's family is finally lifted.

Cinematographer Jack Cardiff recalled that the film 'portrayed Ireland and gypsies and the Derby horse race, so it was very colourful'.⁴² This judgement reflects early discourses on colour which linked it with the

43 The scope for colour in avant-garde films is more open to experimentation than in those operating within classical narrative norms. This was commented on by artist Paul Nash, who writes about the films of Len Lye in 'The colour film', in Charles Davy (ed.), *Footnotes to the Film* (London: Lovat Dickson, 1937), pp. 116–34.

44 For a discussion of the production context, see Anthony Slide, 'Wings of the Morning, an important film', *American Cinematographer*, February 1986, pp. 36–40.

45 Natalie Kalmus, quoted in Huntley, *British Technicolor Films*, p. 22.

46 Interview with Jack Houshold, 18 June 1991, BECTU interview collection, tape 199, BFI Library.

'exotic' and 'otherness'. Indeed, all three films discussed in this essay are linked by their use of colour to highlight questions of racial difference and exoticism within generic contexts which favoured the foregrounding of colour: the outdoor melodrama and empire film. Undoubtedly the genre of a film or its status as mainstream narrative cinema had key implications for the scope permitted for the obtrusive intervention of colour.⁴³ Cardiff had been selected, on the basis of his knowledge of classical painting and lighting structures, as the cinematographer who would serve as camera operator when Technicolor was used at Denham. In addition to learning the craft of working with the large cameras, Cardiff worked alongside Ray Rennahan, Technicolor's cameraman who was brought over from the USA to shoot the film. Although *Wings of the Morning* was registered as a British film, it nevertheless had a huge amount of US involvement quite apart from the Technicolor connection. The producer was Robert T. Kane, an American who had been involved in European productions by Paramount and Fox, and whose company New World Pictures had a financial connection with Fox. Harold Schuster, the director, was also American. Although he was better known as an editor, Schuster took over the direction of the project from Glenn Tyron after some initial shooting had taken place. All of the major technical roles were taken by Americans, with the exception of Cardiff as operating cameraman and Ralph Brinton as art director. The film was shot in England and Ireland, but was processed in the USA.⁴⁴

Natalie Kalmus explained the logic behind the use of colour in the film:

We have tried to preserve one level of colour throughout. Over half the picture was filmed out of doors, so that in these scenes the predominant color is the soft and restful green of the English [Irish] countryside. This approach demonstrates the principle of colour scoring whereby a scene's dominant mood or emotion is underscored by colour. Even in the gypsy prologue to the picture, where some of the costumes are very vivid, they are offset by the masses of green. When we cut from these exterior scenes to interiors we try to preserve the same 'high level'. Our sets are brown, grey and green – warm, rich shades of color for walls, furniture, tapestries and curtains, but all soft and tending to absorb light rather than reflect it. In this way the colors of the interiors and exteriors are kept at the same level.⁴⁵

Indeed, a technician who worked for Technicolor and was involved with the BFI National Archive's 1990 restoration of *Wings of the Morning* commented that it was 'very much a grey picture', which gave it a particular look that detracted from the colours being perceived as garish or hyper-spectacular.⁴⁶ What is achieved instead is 'softness' through colour, with an emphasis on the 'warm' hues of brown, green and mauve/blue (figure 1). These are keyed in to the pastel-shaded costumes worn by Annabella, the lead actress, which was common practice in Technicolor films. Ray Rennahan explained that light makeup



Fig. 1. *Wings of the Morning*.



Fig. 2. *Wings of the Morning*.



Fig. 3. *The Thief of Bagdad*.



Fig. 4. *The Thief of Bagdad*.



Fig. 5. *Blithe Spirit*.



Fig. 6. *Black Narcissus*.



Fig. 7. *Black Narcissus*.



Fig. 8. *Black Narcissus*.

47 'Color films mark return to nature', article (n.d.) in *Wings of the Morning* press file microfiche, British Film Institute library.

48 Steve Neale, *Cinema and Technology: Sound, Image, Colour* (London/Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985), p. 147.

49 Nash, 'The colour film', p. 125.

50 *Variety*, 19 January 1938.

51 *Kinematograph Weekly*, 28 January 1937, p. 35 and in the Technicolor Supplement to the same issue, p. 52.

52 *Kinematograph Weekly*, 28 January 1937, p. 52.

only was needed in front of Technicolor cameras, and that Annabella was a very suitable actress since 'her light-gold hair, brown eyes, and fine, clear skin and complexion are exceptionally valuable attributes for a star of color films'.⁴⁷ Indeed, the poster advertising *Wings of the Morning* announced it as being filmed 'all in the new, natural Technicolor'. This theme of naturalness is maintained in interior scenes: for example there is an obtrusive shot of a fire which is typical of the way Technicolor films sought to emphasize colour through the visual pleasure of natural phenomena. The use of colour in some instances can be interpreted as expressive, since high-key lighting was not used throughout, although as we have seen, 'naturalness' and balance was the goal of Kalmus's design. While this approach was highly influential for the film, the combination of consistent tones with variable, expressive values again highlights the inherent mutability of colour and meaning. The design of the film, 'to preserve one level . . . throughout', cascades colour over a range of objects and within a variety of contexts. The perhaps unintended effect of this is that colour shifts from sequence to sequence in a way that seems rather wide of the mark if the goal is a strategy of consistency. As Steve Neale has noted, there is an inherent contradiction 'between colour as an index of realism and colour as a mark of fantasy, as an element capable, therefore, of disrupting or detracting from the very realism it is otherwise held to inscribe'.⁴⁸ In this sense, discussion of the efficacy of colour in *Wings of the Morning*, and in other early Technicolor films, is illustrative of the tension between measuring the success or failure of colour against its perceived 'naturalism' while recognizing its suitability for spectacle and artistry.

Contemporary critics of Technicolor included the artist Paul Nash, who described *Wings of the Morning* as an example of 'the inane pursuit of naturalism, colour for its own sake, and the naive attempts at colour harmony, do obviously slow up the picture'.⁴⁹ Such criticism implied the filmmakers were allowing colour a space in which to operate outside of conventional imperatives of continuity, sometimes taking longer over a scene because of the need to display colour effects. Other critics, however, praised the film's colour, and for many it pointed the way forward for British films. While some found fault with the film's pace and occasional lapses in logic, the majority agreed that the use of colour was remarkable. The review in *Variety*, for example, recommended a shorter, brisker style and considered the ending to be weak; nevertheless, the summary comment is typical of critics' reactions to the film: 'It will be hailed as fine a pigmentation as has yet appeared'.⁵⁰ The *Kinematograph Weekly* reviewers praised the film's photography, describing it 'as good as anything yet seen on the screen, if not better', because the colour was 'not overdone'.⁵¹ Kane was interviewed, declaring that colour was not the star of the picture but that it 'adds a considerable quota to the entertainment, enhances the value of the film and generally lends it a quality of its own'.⁵² In his handbook on

Technicolor published in 1949, John Huntley commented with similar sentiments that:

There is nothing garish or glaring and even the brilliant scene of the Downs is wonderfully soft in tone. A certain degree of blurring, due to technical defects in the colour process which have since been rectified, if anything adds to the charm of the location scenes; the sharp outlines of modern colour film often results in a too violent effect which destroys the gentle colour tones found in early films.⁵³

⁵³ Huntley, *British Technicolor Films*, p. 21.

While such descriptions can be related to Technicolor in its ‘restrained’ mode, they can also, as noted above, illustrate the expanding repertoire of colour imagery in a variety of contexts and shifting associations. The sequence on the Epsom Downs quoted by Huntley, for example, is remarkable for its use of red as punctuation in the spectacle of the Derby.⁵⁴ It opens with a poster announcing ‘Derby Day!’ in bright red letters, and proceeds to establish London as a city signified in terms of an iconography of ‘landmark London’ (something which, as Charlotte Brunson notes, frequently operates in other films⁵⁵). Red is repeated in a sequence which singles-out red London buses, red and black uniforms worn by the guards at Buckingham Palace, and a Pearly King and Queen, the latter wearing a large hat with predominantly red feathers, as they travel to the Derby in a carriage. In keeping with Eisenstein’s theory of montage, the juxtaposition of these shots adds complexity to the meaning of red itself. While the Pearly King and Queen represent a local, cockney tradition, the marching guards connote a national tradition of royalist pageantry. The shots also demonstrate how colour is affected by texture (the stiffness of the cloth worn by the guards and Pearly Queen’s exuberant feathers) as well as by movement and light. This accent on colour serves as a prelude to the Derby itself, which is also punctuated by red. Here the colour is isolated as spectacle within a frame, for example in a minstrel show performer’s red jacket and in the predominantly red costume worn by a female spectator featured in the montage of the Derby’s feast of visual attractions. These images, which are cumulatively presented to highlight the building excitement before the race, are intercut with shots of a radio commentator in a booth reporting highlights of the Derby’s visual spectacle, which functions as an aural commentary for the film as he tells listeners (and viewers) what he is seeing. It is as if the wonders of Technicolor are not enough; audiences need to be *told* about its ability to capture the full spectacle of the Derby. This again reflects the anxieties associated with Technicolor’s early application and the tension between a desire for colour to be noticed but at the same time to be perceived as ‘natural’ and appropriate to narrative context. An ideological association of colour with race is made explicit when the radio commentator declares: ‘No Derby is complete without the people of Romany; dark-skinned faces, flashing teeth and gay, picturesque clothes with all the colours of the rainbow’. At this point we see the gypsies who have gathered to support Wings, and the caravans singled-

⁵⁴ The Derby was a common feature of newsreels, including shots of gypsy encampments at Epsom, which added to the novelty of the colour Derby sequence in *Wings of the Morning*.

⁵⁵ Charlotte Brunson, *London in Cinema: the Cinematic City since 1945* (London: British Film Institute, 2007), p. 21.

56 Howard Barnes, *The New York Times* (n.d.), British Film Institute microfiche.

out for their colour contrasts. One reviewer complained that this particular sequence was 'too gaudy', whereas the rest of the film was so impressive you could 'almost forget that it was shot in colour'.⁵⁶ This comment does not, however, acknowledge the extent to which colour is emphasized by the film in many other less ostentatious, but nonetheless striking, ways in the pre-Derby sequences.

There are many establishing shots of the Irish landscape which emphasize Technicolor's ability to record natural beauty as scenic spectacle. There are also arresting images which draw attention to colour, such as closeups of an owl with large yellow eyes and of a cockerel with its red comb; and, following Kalmus's use of colour juxtapositions, a fruitbowl containing oranges and purple grapes is featured centre-frame on a table as two characters converse. In the latter instance, the characters are incidental dinner guests who, intrigued by Lord Clontarf's attraction to the gypsy Marie, whisper 'Bewitched!'. Conversations between major characters in a Technicolor film would not normally feature such a distracting addition of colour, but in this case the characters' relative unimportance makes the contrasting colours of the fruit all the more dominant. These examples contradict Nash's claim that the film fails to exploit contrasts, but they do demonstrate how, in a film whose primary attraction is its colour, some scenes negotiate conventional imperatives of continuity by slowing up the action to display features such as the closeup of the owl to which Nash objected.⁵⁷ It is also notable that the film's various interiors allow for a use of colour which departs from the high-key lighting often associated with Technicolor. The dark stable scene in which Maria, dressed as a boy, stays overnight with Kerry allows for subtle changes of tone which are a prelude to daybreak, as the light streams in and another luscious landscape is depicted in Technicolor. In this way the sequences that emphasize colour are experienced relationally in order to create maximum impact. Colour is used here to reinforce other formal elements such as lighting to declare temporal development into the new morning. This can be seen as an example of Technicolor being tied to 'time-tested' cinematic functions: 'In instances where lighting, composition, or music might have highlighted a dramatic development, colour could now be counted on as well'.⁵⁸ *Wings of the Morning* showcases an unusually high number of pictorial landscape shots which offer colour as visual spectacle and which are not strictly necessary to advance the story.

The film also connects colour with physical sensation. In one shot a direct link is made between a fire and the corresponding feeling of heat as Marie warms her hands in a room in which the colour of the flames is the dominant chromatic accent. Here, colour movement and variation of value is key, since the flames are dynamic, inviting synaesthetic suggestion by encouraging the audience to *feel* the impact of the warm fire through *seeing* its 'warm' colour. This impression of warmth is further emphasized by the scene's narrative context, since Maria feels out of place in the castle as the other female guests shun her, and the fire

57 Nash, 'The colour film', p. 118.

58 Higgins, *Harnessing the Technicolor Rainbow*, p. 6.

reminds her of a natural environment in which she feels more comfortable. An emphasis on colour as sensation also features in relation to the blind character Jenepher (Helen Haye), who feels the fabric of Maria's clothes as she unpacks her trunk in the castle. Maria says that she wishes Jenepher could see the dresses, to which she replies: 'I see a great deal of the beauty of life. Sometimes I think because I'm blind there's more perfume in gardens or in the heather when the wind blows over it.' Since there have been so many pictorial, establishing shots of the Irish countryside, this is a sensation that recurs several times throughout the film, as the impact of the colours of nature is emphasized even when these images are not actually shown. Jenepher's ability to 'see a great deal of the beauty of life' is confirmed later in the film when Kerry arranges a party for Maria at the castle. The singer John McCormack entertains the guests with three songs. One of these, 'Killarney', provides the occasion for a montage of scenic images clearly associated with Jenepher's point-of-view, as there is a transition from an image of her to an out-of-focus image of Killarney, which gradually becomes clearer as she apparently acquires a 'memory' image of the scene while McCormack sings of the region's natural beauty. A montage of shots proceeds as a travelogue and concludes with a gradual return to the main party sequence and a reverse transition from an out-of-focus image back to Jenepher. While it was common for montages and transitional passages to motivate colour spectacle, this example is nevertheless unusual. For Nash the presentation of Killarney resulted in a 'vulgar' version of the picture postcard, though this perhaps fails to acknowledge that in this context these images have the added inflection of memory, which provides a clear motivation for their vivid presentation.⁵⁹

59 Nash, 'The colour film', p. 120.

Costumes are also used to display colour: when young Marie first visits Clontarf Castle the daisy-pattern on her dress differentiates it from the less decorative costumes worn by the non-gypsy women. One of the gypsy dancers has an orange underskirt which is displayed as her dress swirls up as she dances for the guests, emphasizing the spectacle of the dance as well as the revelation of colour. Disguising herself as a boy is initially necessary for Maria's escape from Spain, but once in Ireland this is used primarily for comic effect until Kerry discovers her deception and the drab suit is abandoned. This allows for a transformation in which her femininity is confirmed first by a blue chiffon dress and then by the red evening dress she wears when she walks down a staircase and is revealed as a woman to Kerry, whose point-of-view is used to emphasize how he 'sees' her differently for the first time. Since (as the young Marie) she has previously worn red in the film's early, outdoor sequences, the dress appears natural for the character but it now holds a more sexualized connotation, especially when compared to the blue dress which preceded it and was not cued into the male point-of-view. In keeping with Kalmus's rule, the cool blue of the first costume has given way to the activity and passion associated with red. Cinemagoers found this scene memorable for its colour accent, as is shown by one of the respondents to

60 Mayer, *British Cinemas and their Audiences*, p. 231.

61 Michael Powell, *A Life in Movies: an Autobiography* (London: Heinemann, 1986), p. 406.

62 Michael Powell, *Million Dollar Movie* (London: Heinemann, 1932), p. 35.

63 See *Filmfax*, no. 60, April/May 1997, pp. 60–63.

64 Mohja Kahf, 'The image of the Muslim woman in American cinema: two colonialist fantasy films', *Cinefocus*, no. 3 (1995), pp. 19–25.

a question about film preferences placed in *Picturegoer* magazine by Mayer for his study of audiences in the 1940s. A female shorthand typist, aged 34, recorded: 'I shall never forget the dramatic appearance in *Wings of the Morning* of Annabelle [sic] coming downstairs into a room of subdued tones (after one had got used to seeing her disguised in drab boy's clothes) clad in a burgundy evening gown' (figure 2).⁶⁰

After *Wings of the Morning*, the use of Technicolor varied between the restrained mode favoured by films such as *The Divorce of Lady X* (Tim Whelan, 1938) and *Over the Moon* (Thornton Freeland, 1939) and a bold, demonstrative use of colour in *The Thief of Bagdad*. Michael Powell claimed that cinematographer Georges Périnal's lighting for this film 'had staggered the Americans and the Technicolor Company'.⁶¹ Powell also attributed his interest in the potential of colour to *The Thief of Bagdad*: 'The Archers thought in colour from *The Thief of Bagdad* onwards'.⁶² The design of this film provides a useful contrast with *Wings of the Morning* and it is a key film in the history of British Technicolor and for its use of special effects such as back-projection, travelling matte, 'blue screen' compositing, hanging miniatures and Academy Award-winning colour cinematography by Périnal and Osmond Borrodaile.⁶³ Rather than eschewing the idea that colour might be the star of a film, *The Thief of Bagdad* positively relishes this approach. Colour is used for spectacle many times in the film, for example in a shot of a sunset which is immediately followed by a similar natural image of a fire; the combination of these two shots facilitates the editing but also presents arrestingly beautiful images in a spectacular display of natural phenomena in varying hues. From the outset, colour is declared as a dominant register for both narrative and symbolic ends, in this case the dynamic between primaries red and blue. At the opening of the film we see a ship's red sail and, as we get closer, a large blue eye motif painted on the side of its hull, as was common for ships in the Middle East (figure 3). This is first seen from a distance but becomes larger and larger until a closeup of the eye fills the screen. This image then dissolves into a shot of Jaffar (Conrad Veidt), waiting on the quay, wearing a red turban with only the upper half of his face visible. The final closeup of his face and blue eyes creates a colour link between the eye motif and the character, establishing the theme of looking which recurs throughout the film.

As Mohja Kahf has observed, the film plays out the struggle between Jaffar and Ahmed (John Justin), the King of Bagdad, for the 'scopic possession' of a Princess with whom they are both in love.⁶⁴ We learn from a flashback that Ahmed was persuaded by Jaffar, his Grand Vizier, to disguise himself as a poor man in order to become acquainted with his subjects. Under Jaffar's orders Ahmed is arrested, and while incarcerated he meets Abu (Sabu). The two escape and flee to Basra, where Ahmed sees the Princess and falls in love with her. Jaffar is determined to marry the Princess himself, and when he discovers that Ahmed also desires her he uses a spell to make him blind and to turn Abu into a dog. Ahmed will only regain his sight when Jaffar can 'take' the Princess in his arms.

The motif of the eye is thus an important thread throughout the narrative and colour is integral to expressing the conflict between the two characters. As Kahf has suggested, this has distinct ideological connotations in terms of both patriarchy and Orientalism:

The Thief of Bagdad's hero Ahmed has been symbolically castrated (blinded) by the rival Jaffar, an evil Eastern father figure as well. Ahmed's ability to engage in the voyeuristic look of the camera has been suspended. In order to maintain visual pleasure, Jaffar must rape [the Princess] ('take her in my arms') for Ahmed to see again. Psychoanalytically, Ahmed has projected his sadistic scopophilic impulse onto Jaffar so that he can remain a pure and uncomplicated hero and pair with her at the end at a safe distance from the disturbing ambivalence of Jaffar's no less genuine attraction for her.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 21.

Later in the film, the image of the eye is reinforced with the 'All-Seeing Eye', a magical red jewel, that when gazed into, reveals other locations, and which Abu, restored to human form, steals from a temple. The jewel allows him to locate Ahmed, from whom he has become separated. When they look into the red eye together they observe the Princess about to smell a blue rose which will make her forget her hatred of Jaffar (figure 4). Here the colour blue is 'cool', since it makes her forget her anger, but as this film shows, the meanings that are often attributed to colours are indeed variable and fluid. Here, red is the route to insight for Ahmed and Abu, while for the Princess blue signals magic, that should not be trusted, and danger, more usually associated with red. Red and blue also feature in the deadly mechanical creature that kills the Princess's father, again bringing ambiguity to the mix. As Eisenstein observed, in such instances the relationship between colour and object is not a fixed one and it can 'even assume absolutely *contradictory* meanings, dependent only upon the general system of imagery that has been decided upon for the particular film'.⁶⁶ It is fitting that at the end of the film we see Abu on a flying carpet with a rainbow behind him – colour being spectacular to the last in this film.

⁶⁶ Eisenstein, *The Film Sense*, p. 121.

The boldness of the colour used for *Thief of Bagdad* is perhaps explained by developments in Technicolor processing which featured in reviews of the film. The use of colour was clearly designed to be obtrusive, as one reviewer noted: 'Color has been used here with enormous success, to enhance the flavour of the magic and to entrance the eye'.⁶⁷ One dress designer who reviewed the film even went so far as to predict that the film would 'have a great influence on improving the general color taste of women all over the world'.⁶⁸ Yet opinion was mixed as to the desirability of such a spectacular display of colour, ranging from Bosley Crowther's extremely positive review in *The New York Times*, which commented that 'the color alone makes this picture a truly exciting entertainment',⁶⁹ to others who claimed that apart from the colour the story was far from gripping.⁷⁰ There was

⁶⁷ Virginia Wright in *LA News* (nd), quoted in *Technicolor News and Views*, vol. 2, no. 9 (1940).

⁶⁸ Elsa Schiaparelli, quoted in *Technicolor News and Views*, vol. 2, no. 10 (1940).

⁶⁹ *The New York Times*, 6 December 1946.

⁷⁰ For example, *New York Sun*, 6 December 1940.

considerable anxiety therefore around the reception of *Thief of Bagdad*, since along with its special effects, colour was the film's major attraction.

Although many distinguished films were subsequently made in Technicolor, the dominant aesthetic preference remained with black-and-white. This is all the more striking in Britain, where social realism was widely accepted as the defining characteristic of 'quality' cinema. Colour films that were successful (or at least that were remarked upon by critics for their use of colour) were spectacular interventions in a conventional, economy-driven aesthetic system. As shown above, critics would often praise British films for using colour in a non-garish, unobtrusive fashion and with an affinity to the dominant realist aesthetic of black-and-white. Typical of this is a comment on *This Happy Breed* (David Lean, 1944), which claimed Ronald Neame's cinematography 'experimented with the use of entirely muted tones to express the essential drabness of the lives of the people involved in the story'.⁷¹ The 'look' for *This Happy Breed* was a deliberate aesthetic choice, as Neame explained: 'We exaggerated the age and shabbiness of everything; tidemarks round the bath, stains on the walls. With shades of grey and brown to "dirty down" the sets and costumes, I was able to light the picture so that everything looked drabber than normal.'⁷² These comments demonstrate colour being used as an *active system*, rather than as an unobtrusive aesthetic style. Similar comments were made about *Blithe Spirit* (David Lean, 1945), also filmed by Neame, noting approvingly that his camera never escaped 'into a wallow of "glorious" Technicolor. The pastel suggestiveness, the subduedness of the color so completely attuned to the undertones of the piece, are an object lesson in Technicolor's employment.'⁷³ Yet the use of colour in this film was actually quite deliberate and obtrusive, for example in the experimentation with different hues of green for the two women – Elvira (Kay Hammond), the writer's dead wife who has come back as a ghost, and his extant wife Ruth (Constance Cummings) – whose conflict is conducted through colour, particularly green and red (figure 5).

In debates about the problems facing the British film industry in the 1930s and 1940s in respect of Hollywood's domination, Technicolor was understood as part of the broader hegemonic process of 'technology transfer', as had occurred with the transition to sound. It is not surprising that within this context Technicolor is often remembered as brasher than it actually was, since it was associated with Hollywood and wider discourses about national difference. The claims that the British use of colour was somehow more tasteful than its application in the USA are partly explained by a desire to differentiate the British use of colour in a similar manner to which discourses about stardom sought to establish British stars as more refined in terms of their class and theatrical origins. Kay Harrison, manager of Technicolor Ltd, even attributed the specific 'look' of British films to the softer and more subdued light of the region. He commented: 'We haven't a hard, bright light and so our taste is not for strong and vigorous color. The color we shoot outside is soft, and we

71 For example, reviews of *This Happy Breed* quoted in *Technicolor News and Views*, vol. 10, no. 3 (1948).

72 Ronald Neame with Barbara Roisman Cooper, *Straight from the Horses's Mouth* (Lanham, MD and Oxford: Scarecrow Press, 2003), p. 77.

73 *Motion Picture Herald*, 28 April 1945.

⁷⁴ Kay Harrison, quoted in *Technicolor News and Views*, vol. 8, no. 3 (1946).

⁷⁵ Cardiff, in Bowyer, *Conversations with Jack Cardiff*, p. 53.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁷⁷ Huntley, *British Technicolor Films*, p. 106.

carry the same idea with us when we shoot inside.’⁷⁴ For technicians, the issue of authorship features prominently in discourses about Technicolor. In the USA, cinematographers boasted of how they flouted Kalmus’s strictures about the application of Technicolor, and similarly in Britain Jack Cardiff, Oswald Morris and Chris Challis claimed that they challenged or even ignored the stipulations laid down by Technicolor. Indeed, Cardiff has often given detailed accounts of his interest in Technicolor and the specific occasions when he pushed the boundaries established for the process by the company. As he put it, he was ‘the *enfant terrible* of Technicolor, the real bad boy that broke all of their rules, but eventually they came to appreciate what I was trying to do’.⁷⁵ On several occasions he claimed that the innovative lighting and filter techniques he tried were frustrated or blocked by Technicolor, especially when effects could be ‘corrected’ at the printing stage. These instances point to the limitations of Kalmus’s colour control system, although it must be acknowledged that her strictures did impose a degree of regulation which, as time went on, became standard industry practice. At the same time, the ambitions expressed about challenging Technicolor’s authority revolve around the desire to exert another kind of control over colour at the level of production and to enhance the status of the cinematographer as a key figure in Britain’s response to Hollywood.

Cardiff’s first sustained experiment with Technicolor was *A Matter of Life and Death*, a feature film which used colour in a bold, structural manner; scenes of heaven were shot in monochrome (three-strip Technicolor with the colour printed out) and conventional black-and-white, and the earthly world was shot in colour.⁷⁶ While this stylistic choice might appear to be innovative, it was nevertheless inflected with the dominant discourse of restraint, since the transition scenes from the coloured world to black-and-white heaven were deliberately shot in monochrome Technicolor, to avoid ‘the visual shock such changes have evoked in certain films in the past’.⁷⁷ In diegetic terms, colour was associated with a loss of control and sexual desire (the pilot’s reluctance to take his place in heaven after being killed in a plane crash is because he has fallen in love on earth), which also conveys the notion of colour as troubling and chaotic. This points to a central paradox in discussions about Technicolor: those who advocated ‘colour consciousness’ aimed to apply colour with care and control, yet many of the films demonstrate colour’s inherent instability of affect and meaning – knowledge which had the potential to frustrate such a goal.

Cardiff’s and set designer Alfred Junge’s greatest challenge in creating an environment that was perfectly suited to character, colour and dramatic action was *Black Narcissus*, which won Academy Awards for colour cinematography and art/set direction. Adapted from Rumer Godden’s novel, *Black Narcissus* was set in the Himalayas but Powell decided against location shooting on the grounds that a studio environment provided greater opportunity to produce a precisely controlled effect: ‘The atmosphere in this film is everything, and we must

78 Powell, *A Life in Movies*, pp. 562–63.

create and control it from the start. . . . If we went to India and shot a lot of exteriors, according to the usual plan, and then came back to Pinewood and then tried to match them here, you would have two kinds of colour and two kinds of style.⁷⁸ So the Himalayas were recreated at Pinewood and at Leonardslee, a subtropical garden in Horsham, Surrey. The atmosphere that proves so seductive to the English nuns who establish the Convent of St Faith high in the mountains was suggested by Junge's early drawings of the old palace at Mopu, formerly a harem. Junge also created significant interior details in his designs. Of particular note are the erotic wall paintings of the voluptuous women of the harem that cause the nuns embarrassment. These are created with a bold red, green and blue palette that influenced the scoring of colour for the costume designs, particularly those for Kanchi (Jean Simmons), who represents sexuality and 'the East'. Junge's designs, in combination with Technicolor, produce a key effect in the film of combining the past with the present, while simultaneously symbolizing the sexual longings of the nuns, who are profoundly unsettled throughout their stay at Mopu.

The film's themes of losing control, of temptation and sexuality are expressly communicated through the use of Technicolor. Cardiff recalls, for example, how the reddening effects of the process had to be counteracted by making the actors put on pale lipstick. In contrast, Sister Ruth's (Kathleen Byron) rebellion is symbolized by a flagrant use of the colour red, as in the extreme closeup of her putting on lipstick and a red dress she procured illicitly after deciding to leave the Order (figure 6). Red, of course, signifies sexuality, change and activity. Colour is used to signify Ruth's fall from grace – a common association, as David Batchelor notes.⁷⁹ In the scene in which Ruth declares her love for Mr Dean (David Farrar), we see colour used for extreme effect when the screen becomes flooded with red as she faints after his rejection of her. Here colour can be seen to operate as an excessive register, colouring everything in the frame with the association of anger and jealousy as she cries, 'Clodagh, Clodagh, Clodagh!'. In this case the colour red, which has previously connoted uncontrollable passion and rebellion, becomes the most dominant, affective register in a way that is reminiscent of Robert Jones's use of such devices in the early Technicolor 'demonstration mode' film *La Cucaracha*.⁸⁰

Cardiff's use of low-key lighting was remarkable, using few or no fill lights to produce expressionist effects not normally used for Technicolor. He explained how for this technique he drew inspiration from Vermeer and Caravaggio: 'They both lit with very simple light. Many painters did, but with Vermeer and Caravaggio you were very conscious of it; they really used the shadows. Caravaggio would just have one sweeping light over everything so that you were aware of the single light.'⁸¹

Cardiff recalls how in *Black Narcissus* he insisted on using fog filters and diffusing techniques not readily approved of by Technicolor. He had already done this in *A Matter of Life and Death*, and although Technicolor was initially disapproving it appreciated the results he had

79 Batchelor, *Chromophobia*, pp. 23–48.

80 Higgins, *Harnessing the Technicolor Rainbow*, p. 35.

81 Cardiff, in Bowyer, *Conversations with Jack Cardiff*, p. 74.

achieved in that film. A striking example of this technique occurs in the 'stalking' scene towards the end of the *Black Narcissus*, when a tired and distraught Sister Clodagh (Deborah Kerr) goes to ring the bell at dawn, just before she is attacked by Sister Ruth, from whose point-of-view most of the sequence is shot. Cardiff went ahead with his tonal experiments, using a slight fog filter on the camera (unusual for Technicolor) and guided by a 'painterly' imperative, drawing on the expressive tones of Van Gogh and the greens and reds of Rembrandt's paintings. In addition to the fog filter, he used green filters in the filler light and pinkish colours for the sun effects. The sequence begins with Sister Clodagh watching for Sister Ruth outside the convent (figure 7). Pink, mauve and greyish colours form the dominant palette as we are shown Clodagh's every move from Ruth's point-of-view. At first we see Clodagh from afar, a silhouette against a background of dawn breaking. The pinkish tones are visible and are used throughout the sequence not only to show the beginning of a new day but more symbolically to underscore the buildup of tension and the sinister presence of Ruth. The next shot gives a malevolent point-of-view as the camera tracks from behind a wall to indicate Clodagh being spied on from afar as her silhouette gradually takes centre place in the frame. The music builds to an agitated choral swell to accompany the revelation of the stalker with an extreme closeup of Sister Ruth, whose instability is indicated by her glowering look, dishevelled hair and stark, white face. The music resumes with low-toned violins striking an ominous, repetitive rhythm which builds gradually as we follow Clodagh into the chapel, which is lit to accentuate the mauve/pinkish light intruding into the top half of the frame, with the lower half darker in tone. We briefly glimpse Ruth running up the stairs, looking all the more terrifying as she forms a streaking dark shadow against the pink light of dawn and the music again builds to an agitated choral crescendo. On hearing a noise, Clodagh realizes that she is being watched and looks around for the intruder. With Ruth now apparently gone, the tension gives way to some calmer moments as Clodagh leaves the chapel and washes her face, getting ready to perform her duty of ringing the bell. But the high-angle camera and touches of pink light indicate that Ruth is still watching from above, as six o'clock approaches and Clodagh staggers over to the bell tower. Her exhaustion is conveyed as she steadies herself by reaching for the wall, and Cardiff's diffused camera creates an impressionist technique which emphasizes this weariness and disorientation. The sequence reaches its dramatic climax with a struggle at the tower as Ruth, in her attempt to push Clodagh over the precipice, falls to her death.

In addition to Cardiff's key work with colour, the music for the 'stalking sequence' was composed by Brian Easdale before the film was shot, representing an early example of Powell and Pressburger's experiments with 'the composed film'.⁸² In this sense *Black Narcissus* can be related to Eisenstein's conception of organic unity, in which colour performs a key role in relation to sound:

⁸² Sarah Street, *Black Narcissus* (London: IB Tauris, 2005), pp. 21–2.

⁸³ Sergei Eisenstein, 'One path to color: an autobiographical fragment', trans. Jay Leyda, in Lewis Jacobs (ed.), *The Movies as Medium* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus & Gironox, 1970), pp. 206–07.

⁸⁴ Interview with Jack Cardiff on Craig McCall's *Painting with Light* documentary, (Modus Operandi Films and Smoke & Mirrors Film Productions, 2000).

⁸⁵ Eisenstein, 'On colour', reprinted in Dalle Vacche and Price (eds), *Color: the Film Reader*, p. 107.

For it is color, color and again color to the very end, which can solve the problems of proportion and abduction to produce a general unity of sound and visual factors. The higher forms of organic relationship between the melodic outline of music and the tonal structure of systematically blended color shots are possible only with the appearance of color in the cinema.⁸³

It is perhaps here that the undeveloped, utopian aspects of Kalmus's thinking on colour were realized, since, as previously noted, in spite of her role overseeing 'colour control' for Technicolor films, she sympathized with aims for colour as 'one expression of more ultimate art'. In the 'stalking' sequence this technique is clearly demonstrated, as the 'composed film' operates as a sequence which is united by a precise combination of editing, musical punctuation, movement within the frame, juxtaposition through lighting and, of course, colour. It is therefore no surprise that when the rushes were screened, after initial objections Technicolor consented to leave the scene as shot, in appreciation of what Cardiff was trying to achieve.⁸⁴

Used in conjunction with low-key lighting, Cardiff's 'painterly' use of Technicolor is capable of conveying subtleties of mood that would have been impossible had a different cinematographic approach been deployed. Under his direction, colour vividly captures the exoticism of Leonardslee's azaleas and rhododendrons. The gardens of Leonardslee are highlighted for their colour as part of the film's creation of Mopu as the eastern 'other'. Colours are also associated with the characters of the Young General (Sabu) in his excessively splendid silks and jewels and, as previously mentioned, of Kanchi. On other occasions, as the analysis of the stalking sequence demonstrates, colour is used in an expressive way via the privileging of a pink, mauve and grey-black colour palette to create suspense. When a similar colour palette is used for Calcutta at the beginning of the film, it connotes order and regimentation; by the end of the film these same colours are highlighted, particularly the pink, to illustrate the extent to which order has completely broken down at St Faith's. This usage of colour applies Eisenstein's theory, in which colour is perceived relationally to context:

For convergence between sound and colour can only take place through the visual image, i.e. through something psychologically specific but essentially changeable, subject as it is to the mutations imposed by its content and by the overall conceptual system. What is unique in an image and what can blend essentially with it are absolute only in the conditions of a *given* context, of a *given* iconography, of a *given* construct.⁸⁵

Colours therefore alter their meaning according to context. The precise, controlled vision of the East created by Junge similarly shifts meaning in curious ways. On some occasions it functions as the mysterious 'other' of the western imagination, while on others it is

strangely familiar to the west, for example in the vivid flashback when Clodagh's memory is visually linked by shots of the blue sky and blossoms at Mopu to the stunning landscape of Ireland that forms the backdrop to her own 'exotic' appearance in her former life (figure 8). This shot provides the audience with added spectacle of Deborah Kerr as film star, allowing sight of that which her nun costume has so far denied them – her red hair (a colour which Ray Rennahan, cinematographer on *Wings of the Morning* and many other films shot in Technicolor, including *Gone With the Wind* [Victor Fleming, 1939], declared particularly suited to the technique).⁸⁶

These examples show that there was indeed an adventurous and at times innovative approach to the application of Technicolor in Britain. While this essay has concentrated on three particular films, there are others which are notable for their negotiation of colour film aesthetics within British cinema, including *Blanche Fury* (Marc Allégret, 1947), *Saraband for Dead Lovers* (Basil Dearden, 1948) and *Moulin Rouge* – the latter being particularly striking for cinematographer Ossie Morris's innovations with Technicolor through colour coding for characters using filtered lights, fog filters on the camera and smoke effects on the set to recreate the style of Toulouse-Lautrec's postimpressionist paintings.⁸⁷ Nevertheless it is important to bear in mind that experimentation was occurring elsewhere, not least in the USA when, as Scott Higgins points out, 'the 1940s brought a confidence in colour which rendered [such] obvious emulation of black-and-white technique less important'.⁸⁸ The export of Technicolor to the UK provoked a variety of responses. While for some colour had the potential to ensure the cinema's advancement as an art form, others were cautious about its threat to dominant cinematic codes which placed film form as subservient to story. Torn between celebrating the novelty value of colour and reining-in its expressive potential, producers, directors, cinematographers, art directors and stars could not, however, ignore its impact as a technology which heralded new economic and aesthetic challenges. Perceptions of Natalie Kalmus's imposition of rigid 'colour control' over British films reflect wider debates about the status of the British film industry in the 1930s and 1940s. While for many commentators Technicolor represented another instance of Hollywood's dominance, it also provided an opportunity to explore product differentiation, as external control was neither entirely possible nor indeed desirable. Higgins concludes that 'The general principles endorsed by the professional press and proffered by Natalie Kalmus never mandated a single, undifferentiated approach to color'.⁸⁹ Indeed, Kalmus delivered a service with which cinematographers and art directors negotiated, and in their different ways everyone involved sought to impose some level of control over colour. Since the impact of colour is subject to many variables, from the quality of the print to the cultural context of reception, this aspiration remained (and remains) as elusive as colour itself. Yet drawing on Natalie Kalmus's ideas of 'colour consciousness', films such as *Wings of the Morning*, *The Thief of Bagdad*

⁸⁶ BFI library microfiche on *Wings of the Morning*, Rennahan, 'Color films mark return to nature' article (nd)

⁸⁷ For an extended study see Sarah Street, *The Negotiation of Innovation: British Cinema in Colour*, forthcoming. Ossie Morris's experiments with colour in *Moulin Rouge* and *Moby Dick* (1956) are detailed in his autobiography *Huston, We Have a Problem* (Lanham, MD and Oxford: Scarecrow Press, 2006), pp. 66–75, 83–91.

⁸⁸ Scott Higgins, 'Technology and aesthetics: Technicolor cinematography and design in the late 1930s', *Film History*, vol. 11 (1999), p. 64.

⁸⁹ Higgins, *Harnessing the Technicolor Rainbow*, p. 213.

and *Black Narcissus* demonstrate how colour could play a fundamental, integral role in the scoring of dramatic action and the enhancement of cinema's expressive potential. In the context of a British cinema that was primarily associated with black-and-white, 'quality' social realism, this was indeed remarkable.

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British Technicolor Fiction Feature Films, 1937–56 (including coproductions; dates as per Film Index International)

- 1937:** *Victoria the Great* (Herbert Wilcox; sequence in Technicolor); *Wings of the Morning* (Harold Schuster)
- 1938:** *The Divorce of Lady X* (Tim Whelan); *The Drum* (Zoltan Korda); *Sixty Glorious Years* (Herbert Wilcox)
- 1939:** *The Four Feathers* (Zoltan Korda); *The Mikado* (Victor Schertzinger); *Over the Moon* (Thornton Freeland)
- 1940:** *The Thief of Bagdad* (Ludwig Berger, Michael Powell)
- 1942:** *The Great Mr Handel* (Norman Walker)
- 1943:** *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger)
- 1944:** *Henry V* (Laurence Olivier); *This Happy Breed* (David Lean); *Western Approaches* (Pat Jackson)
- 1945:** *Blithe Spirit* (David Lean); *Caesar and Cleopatra* (Gabriel Pascal)
- 1946:** *Laughing Lady* (Paul L. Stein); *London Town* (Wesley Ruggles); *A Matter of Life and Death* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger); *Men of Two Worlds* (Thorold Dickinson)
- 1947:** *An Ideal Husband* (Alexander Korda); *Black Narcissus* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger); *Blanche Fury* (Marc Allégret); *Jassy* (Bernard Knowles); *The Man Within* (Bernard Knowles)
- 1948:** *Bonnie Prince Charlie* (Anthony Kimmins); *The Red Shoes* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger); *Saraband for Dead Lovers* (Basil Dearden); *Scott of the Antarctic* (Charles Frend); *Trottie True* (Brian Desmond Hurst)
- 1949:** *The Blue Lagoon* (Frank Launder); *Christopher Columbus* (David Macdonald); *Elizabeth of Ladymead* (Herbert Wilcox); *Maytime in Mayfair* (Herbert Wilcox); *Under Capricorn* (Alfred Hitchcock, UK/US)
- 1950:** *The Black Rose* (Henry Hathaway); *Captain Horatio Hornblower RN* (Raoul Walsh); *Gone to Earth* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger); *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman* (Albert Lewin); *Treasure Island* (Byron Haskin, UK/US)
- 1951:** *The African Queen* (John Huston, UK/US); *The Elusive Pimpernel* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger); *Happy Go Lovely* (H. Bruce Humberstone); *The House in the Square* (Roy Ward Baker); *The Magic Box* (John Boulting); *The Tales of Hoffman* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger); *Where No Vultures Fly* (Harry Watt)

1952: *The Crimson Pirate* (Robert Siodmak, UK/US); *Decameron Nights* (Hugo Fregonese); *Father's Doing Fine* (Henry Cass); *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Anthony Asquith); *It Started in Paradise* (Compton Burnett); *Ivanhoe* (Richard Thorpe, UK/US); *Made in Heaven* (John Paddy Carstairs); *The Man Who Watched Trains Go By* (Harold French); *Meet Me Tonight* (Anthony Pelissier); *Penny Princess* (Val Guest); *Saturday Island* (Stuart Heisler); *South of Algiers* (Jack Lee); *The Story of Robin Hood and His Merrie Men* (Ken Annakin, UK/US); *24 Hours of a Woman's Life* (Victor Saville); *Where's Charley?* (David Butler)

1953: *The Beggar's Opera* (Peter Brook); *Genevieve* (Henry Cornelius); *Hell Below Zero* (Mark Robson, UK/US); *Isn't Life Wonderful!* (Harold French); *Laughing Anne* (Herbert Wilcox); *The Love Lottery* (Charles Crichton); *The Master of Ballantrae* (William Keighley); *Melba* (Lewis Milestone); *The Million Pound Note* (Ronald Neame); *Moulin Rouge* (John Huston); *Rob Roy the Highland Rogue* (Harold French, UK/US); *Sea Devils* (Raoul Walsh, UK/US); *Star of India* (Arthur Lubin, UK/US/It); *The Story of Gilbert and Sullivan* (Sidney Gilliat); *The Sword and the Rose* (Ken Annakin, UK/US); *They Who Dare* (Lewis Milestone); *The Titfield Thunderbolt* (Charles Crichton); *Will Any Gentleman ...?* (Michael Anderson)

1954: *Abdulla the Great* (Gregory Ratoff, UK/Egypt); *Animal Farm* (Joy Batchelor, John Halas); *The Beachcomber* (Muriel Box); *The Black Knight* (Tay Garnett, UK/US); *The Constant Husband* (Sidney Gilliat); *Doctor in the House* (Ralph Thomas); *Duel in the Jungle* (George Marshall); *Golden Ivory* (George P. Breakston); *Happy Ever After* (Mario Zampi); *His Majesty O'Keefe* (Byron Haskin, UK/US); *Mad About Men* (Ralph Thomas); *Malaga* (Richard Sale); *The Purple Plain* (Robert Parrish); *The Rainbow Jacket* (Basil Dearden); *Romeo and Juliet* (Renato Castelliani, UK/It); *The Scarlet Spear* (George P. Breakston, UK/US); *West of Zanzibar* (Harry Watt); *You Know What Sailors Are!* (Ken Annakin)

1955: *An Alligator Named Daisy* (J. Lee Thompson); *The Cockleshell Heroes* (José Ferrer, UK/US); *Doctor at Sea* (Ralph Thomas); *Footsteps in the Fog* (Arthur Lubin); *Geordie* (Frank Launder); *The Ladykillers* (Alexander Mackendrick); *Now and Forever* (Mario Zampi); *Oh ... Rosalinda!!* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger); *A Prize of Gold* (Marc Robson, UK/US); *Raising a Riot* (Wendy Toye); *Richard III* (Laurence Olivier); *Simon and Laura* (Muriel Box); *Storm Over the Nile* (Zoltan Korda); *To Paris With Love* (Robert Hamer); *Touch and Go* (Michael Truman); *Value for Money* (Ken Annakin); *The Woman for Joe* (George More O'Ferrall)

1956: *The Battle of the River Plate* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger); *Beyond Mombasa* (George Marshall, UK/US); *The Black Tent* (Brian Desmond Hurst); *The Feminine Touch* (Pat Jackson); *House of Secrets* (Guy Green); *Invitation to the Dance* (Gene Kelly, MGM British); *The Iron Petticoat* (Ralph Thomas); *It's A Wonderful World* (Val Guest); *Port Afrique* (Rudolph Maté); *Safari* (Terence Young); *The Spanish Gardener* (Philip Leacock); *Tarzan and the Lost Safari* (H. Bruce Humberstone); *Zarak* (Terence Young, UK/US)

TV on the brain

AMELIE HASTIE

1 Season One, Episode Five (2004).

In ‘Damned If You Do’, an episode of *House* (Fox, 2004–), patient-of-the-week Sister Mary Augustine eventually – one might say inevitably – enters the divine yet foreboding space of the MRI machine.¹ She has become increasingly sick throughout diagnostician Dr Gregory House’s attempts to treat her mysterious condition; so, as is standard in this series, House prescribes an MRI exam. After one of his assistants, Dr Chase, wheels her down the hall, we cut abruptly to the machine itself, which has half of the nun’s body already inside. Shot at a slight diagonal, the sliding table protrudes almost infinitely out of the giant cylindrical body of the apparatus. The contraption glows from the inside – a mechanical halo around the nun’s body – which in turn darkens the space around its outside. The patient’s body is bare, save for a hospital gown, and the room is empty except for a portable cupboard to the right of the MRI. The camera swings to the left, emphasizing the spartan nature of this scene, and then we quickly cut to an image of the nun inside: shot from behind, her face is brightened by the light, though with her torso as focal point she seems to be entering a darkening tunnel (figure 1). With another quick edit, she is shown in closeup and in profile against a purely white background (figure 2): a luminous point in the midst of the unknown. To punctuate these visual, spiritual indicators, she announces: ‘As Jonah said from inside the whale, when I’d lost all hope I turned my thoughts to the Lord’. As she begins to speak, we cut to a view of the medical team behind a glass wall, preparing to follow the monitors that will show them the inside of her body. This whole sequence is essentially shot from a similar point of view as the MRI digital images they are about to read, for magnetic resonance imaging technology blackens out bones to highlight soft tissue – that is, darkening the space around it with an almost divine attention to aberration.



Fig. 1.



Fig. 2.

House, 'Damned If You Do' (2004).

² For just a few examples, see *House*, *ER* and *Grey's Anatomy*, as well as *The Sopranos*, *Six Feet Under* and *Point Pleasant*.

In many ways this sequence is extraordinary, if not exactly unique. A seeming literalization of the fears and promises that accompany medical technologies like the MRI, it is also shot quite conventionally as such sequences go. Indeed, the MRI machine makes increasingly frequent guest appearances in television drama, both in medical fiction and in a range of serials, with a recurring role in *House*.² Of course the same could be said of any object, especially those that refer to communications technologies or means of seeing – a telephone, a video camera, a rearview mirror – but I would like to take this particular object's presence as an opportunity to consider how our own perception as viewers is staged through the television, leading us to a process of interpretation or a 'diagnosis' of the scene before us. Like other diagnostic tools such as the EKG, ultrasound monitor, and so on, the MRI uses a screen to let the doctors see into a patient's body, though its particular talent, and the one usually showcased by television, is its ability to display neurological functions and disorders. Performing its own 'fort/da' game, the MRI sequence is almost always the same: a patient disappears into the machine, and the camera either stays outside

or briefly accompanies the patient in, but from behind or to the side, eventually cutting away to the medical technicians and doctors on hand – the site of diagnosis. Thus, the patient disappears in order for the machine to show us the brain, visualizing the source of perception.

The staging of MRI sequences on a television screen allows for an intersection of multiple scenes and perspectives: the sight of the disappearing body, the still digital images in its wake, coincidental narrative sites across the text's plot, and, of course, our own view of the television screen. My perspective here is a subjective one. The provocation for this essay stemmed from my subjective experience – or series of experiences – which were also acutely tied to my perceptive abilities (a number of MRI exams, the brain surgery that followed some and preceded more, and my television viewing practices before and since). In this way, this essay is provoked by a case of phenomenology in the flesh – my changing perception of things wrought by changes to my brain. Through repeated viewings of these repeated sequences and through my own perceptual shifts, I began to think about connections between media forms (medical imaging technologies and television) and the powers of diagnosis and interpretation that each enables for the subjects before the screen. Coexisting with the screen before me, I became, in effect, what John Ellis deems a 'witness' through and to televisual form and image.³

My own perceptual shifts – and certainly my status as 'witness' – necessarily began before my brain was cut open. During my first experience in an MRI pod, I was trapped by the double confinement of medical technologies and verisimilitude. Basically, I was shocked to learn the exam would last fifty minutes (and I briefly wondered how I would endure it). My first thought was 'they don't take that long on television!'. I later declared that over twenty years of soap opera viewing had prepared me for a brain tumour, but my initial response was anger that decades of television had *not* prepared me for the experience of the exam itself. That said, this is not an essay about non-realistic representations of MRI machines; it is rather an occasion to bridge televisual narrative and representation and the forms of our experiences as television viewers. In most medical dramas, images of the brain are literally stilled and distilled through the MRI and filtered through television, so that the two become related scenes – or screens – of perception. Recognizing the contrasting, yet intersecting, forms of realism – in medical discourse, in television, and through perceptual experiences – can also direct us to begin to understand the limits and possibilities of televisual perception.

This is perhaps a natural connection. The MRI was developed in part through an intersection between photographic, televisual and digital technologies. As many scholars have shown, medical imaging technologies and moving image media were developed simultaneously and sometimes in concert. As is well known, cinematic technologies in particular arose to a certain extent from an increasing desire to study the body – demonstrated by Étienne-Jules Marey's study of physical

3 John Ellis, *Seeing Things: Television in the Age of Uncertainty* (London: IB Tauris, 2000).

4 Lisa Cartwright writes: 'To many film historians, 1895 was the year of the "birth" of the cinema; for historians of technology and medicine, however, 1895 is the year of the discovery of the X-ray'. Lisa Cartwright, *Screening the Body: Tracing Medicine's Visual Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p. 107.

5 Foucault writes that the clinical gaze 'refrains from all possible intervention, and from all experimental decision, and which does not modify, shows that its reserve is bound up with the strength of its armature'. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: an Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1994), p. 108.

6 José Van Dijck, *The Transparent Body: a Cultural Analysis of Medical Imaging* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2005), p. 66.

7 Anthony Brinton Wolbarst, *Looking Within: How X-Ray, CT, MRI, Ultrasound and Other Medical Images Are Created, and How They Help Physicians Save Lives* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), p. 143.

8 Jackie Stacey, *Teratologies: a Cultural Study of Cancer* (London: Routledge, 1997); Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004). See also: bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1999); Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (London: Verso, 2002); Patricia Mellencamp, *High Anxiety: Catastrophe, Scandal, Age and Comedy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992).

9 See Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings*, trans. John Reddick (London: Penguin Books, 2003).

movement and Jean-Martin Charcot's problematic investigations of hysteria. And, as cinema came into being, so too did the X-ray.⁴ Decades later, the ability to simultaneously record and see the internal workings of our bodies arose in tandem with television technologies. The medicalization of our bodies has thus become increasingly mediated. José van Dijck, for instance, describes the 'endoscopic gaze' as an extension of the 'cinematic gaze' (implicitly drawing on Michel Foucault's description of the 'clinical gaze'⁵). Through technological advances in video, television, camera size, and fibre optic cables, our access to the 'inside' of the body is increasingly immediate: 'we no longer peer from the outside in, through an incision in the skin'.⁶ The MRI – which brings together electromagnetic and digital technologies – is similarly indebted to visual and communications technologies, for it could not have existed without the computer, as more than one scholar has noted.⁷ In a nutshell, the electromagnetism measures the interior of the body, while electronic and digital technologies allow it to be visualized. But rather than giving us the gory detail of the endoscopic camera (complete with organs, blood and other bodily fluids), it offers us instead a seemingly sterile view of what is inside. Because of its ability to see through bones, this digital technology in effect produces 'films': still pictures largely resembling X-rays of interior soft tissue, revealing disease or tumours – those masses and aberrations which are not supposed to be where they are eventually found.

Much of this burgeoning ability to visualize the workings of our internal being was focused on women's bodies, and this fact has generated significant work by feminist cultural and media theorists, allowing us to think about the ways in which women so centrally and from so many vantage points remain the objects of visual scrutiny and investigation. Feminist analysis has also enabled more self-reflexive investigation, from both psychoanalytic and phenomenological points of view, such as Jackie Stacey's brilliant *Teratologies: a Cultural Study of Cancer* and Vivian Sobchack's groundbreaking *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*.⁸ Both Stacey and Sobchack draw on personal histories to challenge mediated and medicalized conceptions of women's bodies – those which alternately celebrate technology, produce a dichotomy between mind and body, and disavow the significance of women's experiences. Through such challenges, feminist work attends to the ways in which we perceive and theorize through our bodies as sentient and social subjects. It is this complex matrix of feminist approaches that has spurred on this project – a project that bridges textual analysis, technological forms and autobiographical reflection, each of which offers a way of seeing. By turning to the repeated form of the televised MRI sequence – and in turn connecting it to my own experience – I am performing an act of 'working through', a Freudian term for the ways in which the analysand, though an ongoing return to particular events, is led to an abreaction, or a cathartic release.⁹

10 Ellis, *Seeing Things*, p. 74.

11 Ibid., p. 79–80.

12 John Caldwell, *Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), p. 190.

13 Margaret Morse, 'An ontology of everyday distraction: the freeway, the mall, and television', in Patricia Mellencamp (ed.), *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 193–221, p. 194.

14 Stacey, *Teratologies*, pp. 157–8.

15 Anne Beaulieu, 'The brain at the end of the rainbow: the promises of brain scans in the research field and in the media', in Janine Marchessault and Kim Sawchuk (eds), *Wild Science: Reading Feminism, Medicine, and the Media* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 39–52, p. 44.

Television itself, argues Ellis, produces a process of its own 'working through'. Enabled by 'multiple stories and frameworks for explanation',¹⁰ as well as its sense of 'liveness' and its ongoing structure of repetition, television can function like the analysand herself. 'Working through is a constant process of making and remaking meanings and of exploring possibilities.' Existing 'in almost the same moment that we do when we see them', televised events 'demand explanation, they incite curiosity, revulsion and the usually frustrated or passing desire for action. We need, in other words, to work them through.'¹¹ Such insistence is incited not just by certain televised events but by the very structure of broadcast television; as John Caldwell suggests, 'The televisual flow demands active decipherment and critical facility on the part of the viewer'.¹² And as Margaret Morse shows in her analysis of television's links to other everyday forms, 'Television is a key element of . . . exchanges and transformations, not only because it invests images with exchange value but also because it models exchange itself, both as an apparatus which includes the viewer virtually in discourse and via representations of constant shifts through various ontological levels, subjective relations, and fields of reference'.¹³ For as subjects who watch and witness television, we move between multiple images and stories – sometimes set on the screen simultaneously – and begin to embody its very form of exchange ourselves. As I move between theoretical analysis and autobiographical reflection, scientific discourses and textual evidence, I write as a television viewer and, ultimately, as television itself.

Jackie Stacey delineates how medical technologies reimagine us:

The inside of the body can be monitored and imaged through an ever-increasing number of technological options. The flesh-and-blood body is translated into a set of computer signals, a series of wavelengths, or a photographic reproduction. The significant knowledge about what is going on inside is captured as external image or code, mediated through technological processes which have invisible, though often damaging, effects.¹⁴

These medical, 'visualized' documents are unlike our conventional understanding of moving image media – such as narrative television form – even while they are based on the same kinds of beliefs in verisimilitude often ascribed to film and television. In her work on brain imaging, for instance, Anne Beaulieu cites a medical worker who claimed, 'They're non-pictures, they're statistical maps. So you're showing hard scientific evidence!'¹⁵ What we see in an MRI brain scan, then, is not an image of the brain but a form of measurement. Or, as a medical consultant for *House* put it in conversation with me, the MRI snapshot is a kind of confirmation of the manifestation of symptoms the patient is having; in the case of the still MRI image, he suggested, 'the

word ‘map’ is more poetic than it is practical’. Yet, at the same time, argues Beaulieu,

The images themselves were presented as though they were photographs, transparently rendering the brain’s activity. This strategy relies on the assumption of photographic realism, and insists on the fact that the representation was a record of what was simply taking place.¹⁶

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 46.

Or, as Van Dijk suggests:

The convergence of media and medical technologies have resulted in an enhanced sense of the real – the suggestion of an increased transparency – when it comes to capturing the activities and anxieties involved in medical operations.¹⁷

¹⁷ Van Dijk, *The Transparent Body*, p. 34.

The ‘strategy’ of realism – and its attendant anxieties, born in part through the different assumptions such images contain –resonate with my own experience. For instance, at my six-week checkup after my brain surgery, I asked my surgeon how long he thought it would be before my short-term memory and multi-tasking functions would return to normal (or if they ever would). His response (which he repeated relentlessly): ‘You’ve seen the film! There was no brain damage.’ His claims provoked multiple possible reactions from me: those related to the status of the film-as-image, ordered as spatially determined evidence, and those related to film-as-narrative, ordered as temporally organized evidence. That is, I first briefly wavered over whether or not I should have a debate with him about photographic realism: about, for instance, the framing and context of the image and how its modes of construction direct our perception of it. I also fantasized that there might in fact be a film – a movie – about my experience.¹⁸ Instead of offering up such images or debates to my surgeon – either fantastic or philosophical – I simply (and pointlessly) tried to explain my own *experience* of short-term memory loss to him. This was a case, as Stacey describes it, of a female patient having to attend to the gaps of a male doctor:

In such a context the patient often suffers because of the medical profession’s inability to process their own emotions; in the case of the female patient and the male doctor, women are once again obliged to facilitate, to cover for, men’s emotional ineptitude.¹⁹

¹⁸ My friends and I often talked about an imaginary screenplay during this time, to be entitled ‘Not Without My Smells! The Amelie Hastie Story’, for there was ‘brain damage’ during the surgery: my olfactory nerve was necessarily severed to get to the tumour, and I lost my sense of smell. The film would therefore be a (brave, fictionalized) account of my efforts to retrieve it with the help of my faithful dog.

¹⁹ Stacey, *Teratologies*, p. 107.

Unfortunately, I was not able to *successfully* facilitate in this instance, however much I might have tried. For as with other elements of my experience at the time, the challenge to my memory was not visible to those who saw me nor, apparently, was it ‘visualizable’ through medical technologies. Without others being able to see what I felt and knew, my own perception (in fact, my perception of myself, of the way my mind was working – in other words, my perception of my own ability to *perceive*) was challenged at multiple levels.

Some of the origins of my changing sense of perception sprung from the very location of my tumour: it had been lodged partly in my optic nerve, so that my vision had been very slightly distorted. After the surgery, looking at too expansive a space – the ocean waves, a forest – became dizzying. Here, again, is where television comes in. During this period when I was not entirely sure who I was or who I would become, the television screen was a site of familiarity and solace. I watched it in part because I could understand it. Not only did I know its rules – of commercial interruption, schedule and fictional narrative conventions – but its finite space, framed by the set itself, also allowed for my focused gaze (one might say the same for the ‘films’ my surgeon read). When I think back on this time, my imaginary perspective shifts the terms of the scene, so that I simultaneously see both myself lying in bed and the television against the opposite wall. In this memory, I am divided by physical space from the television screen, yet I am also joined to it through the very act of seeing, or ‘witnessing’. My own visual ‘set’ is not so very unlike the screen from which television doctors view the results of their patients’ MRI exams, yet there are two very significant differences. First, on television the patient is not the one who looks *at* the screen but is the one looked at and through. Second, the images the doctors examine are still; these are slices of time, a counterpoint to televisual narrative and embodied experience. I want, then, in this essay to conjoin these narrative conventions and ways of seeing, identifying a body divided from the image, in turn reconnected through the television viewer.

Part of what I am describing here is a kind of ‘divided attention’ – the means by which television and its viewers juggle scenes and therefore the means of showing or perceiving.²⁰ In *Suspensions of Perception*, Jonathan Crary traces a history of attention in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The notion of attention, Crary argues, is developed in part out of an impulse to discipline and understand our powers of perception and to construct the autonomous subject. Yet, as Crary shows, ‘The more one investigated, the more attention was shown to contain within itself the conditions for its own undoing – attentiveness was in fact continuous with states of distraction, reverie, dissociation, and trance’.²¹ Its contiguity with distraction lies in its very nature: ‘Attention as a process of selection necessarily meant that perception was an activity of *exclusion*, of rendering parts of a perceptual field unperceived’.²² Through changing technological relations, social configurations and economic imperatives, we learn to ‘naturally’ switch our attention from one thing to the next. This is the cultural logic of capitalism, Crary notes (drawing on the work of Frederic Jameson), a logic which divides the means of production from (and transforms it into) a consumer-based ‘choice’. Certainly this ‘culture’ includes the logic of television and also, to an extent, medical technologies, as their very structures are based on the management of divisions. With television, we see those divisions as between narrative text and commercial segments, networks, hours of the day. In medical imaging, a focus on one part of the

20 See, for instance, Tania Modleski’s seminal essay, ‘The search for tomorrow in today’s soap operas’, in *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-produced Fantasies for Women* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1982).

21 Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), pp. 45–6.

22 *Ibid.*, pp. 24–5.

body means it is essentially (if only temporarily) ‘excluded’ from the rest. The EKG measures the heart, while the MRI measures a ‘slice’ of the body such as the brain, the knee or the shoulder.

Given the nature of the MRI and its placement within television dramas in particular, we can also recognize a division between ‘still’ and ‘moving’ images. The still of the brain, of course, never entirely displaces the moving image of television (as with the acts of attention and distraction). Rather, it exists as part of that image. Scott Curtis describes this phenomenon in the hermeneutic relationships he maps between medical and cinematic technologies, suggesting that ‘even though medical imaging is overwhelmingly “still”, it cannot be understood apart from the “moving”’. He continues:

In a broader sense, moving images in medical diagnosis and research enact important dilemmas of representation and interpretation at the very heart of medicine. Just as medicine must contend with an ephemeral, moving, vital object – the human body – so must physicians who integrate moving images in their research . . . come to grips with an elusive, temporal object. The human body is oppugantly *alive*, frustratingly resistant to contemplation, study, and interpretation.²³

²³ Scott Curtis, ‘Still/moving: digital imaging and medical hermeneutics’, in Lauren Rabinovitz and Abraham Geil (eds), *Memory Bytes: History, Technology, and Digital Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), pp. 218–254, p. 221.

In the case of the MRI ‘results’ that we see on television, these images allow a point of stillness, a focal point of concentration, against the chaos of the moving bodies. These stills, moreover, are often caught by the moving cameras around them, which only increases the sense of chaos (or realism), however accustomed we are to seeing it. Indeed, the very ephemerality of the chaotic movement surrounding the still images places them in ‘real’ time, or at least the time of the present.

In the case of cinematic texts, we could read these still images – like, yet also unlike, photographs – as allegorical representations of the frames that make up a strip of film. We experience film in a constant state of tension between movement and stillness (even if this is largely an unconscious experience), yet because it is made up of still frames, film’s motion is itself illusory. Television technology is, of course, different. Broadcast by a feed, its images have transformed the moving still into an array of pixels, indiscernible on their own, somewhat similar to the breaks between stills in film yet also very much unlike them. Our ‘encounters’ with these different forms, as Sobchack writes, ‘transform us as *embodied subjects*’. She goes on: ‘Each technology not only differently *mediates* our figurations of bodily existence but also *constitutes* them. That is, each offers our lived bodies radically different ways of “being-in-the-world”’.²⁴ The differentiations she proposes are useful when multiple technological forms come together in order to complicate how we might perceive them simultaneously. As Sobchack contends: ‘The photographic both chemically and metaphorically “fixes” its ostensible subject quite literally as an *object* for vision’. As a representational and material form, it also allows for ‘self-possession’

²⁴ Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, p. 136. Emphasis in the original, *passim*.

25 Ibid., pp. 142–4.

26 Ibid., pp. 146–51.

27 Ibid., p. 153.

28 Laura Mulvey, *Death 24 x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), p. 186.

29 Ibid., p. 175.

and ‘self-proliferation’ but in its fixity and its materiality, its temporal nature, suggests Sobchack, is that of a ‘moment’ and is fixed in time.²⁵ While the cinematic animates the photograph and lends itself to the temporality of the present – a heterogeneity and a ‘coming into being’²⁶ – the electronic, she contends, is of still another time. Generated through ‘pervasion’ and ‘dispersion’, electronic forms of representation produce a ‘centerless, networklike structure of the *present*’ which leaves us in a ‘quasi-disembodied (or diffusively embodied) state’.²⁷ In her exegesis on the intersections between movement and stillness through viewing cinema digitally, Laura Mulvey sees these multiple temporal states – such as the past and present – blending together.²⁸ This new state, or plural positioning, is a result not just of technological but also of affective, economic and social processes, which together effect the formation of our subjectivity. It is a state of attention that is divided, yet in this division there is a design towards reconciliation and reordering – of temporalities, materialities, patients’ and viewers’ bodies.

What we then have in MRI scenes on television – where the still scan replaces the body in the machine and meets the electronic and moving televisual image – is a potentially complex negotiation of these forms and, in effect, our own positions as perceiving subjects. At its essence, the convergence of photographic and electronic media, alongside medical imaging, produces a complicated scene of perception. On the one hand we have the distracting gaze television produces through its electronic form and its ideology of ‘liveness’. On the other, we have a more localizable scene of perception in which our attention is directed and sustained by the still scan (itself a digital image that looks a lot like a giant film negative, printed on silver fluoride, enabled by electromagnetic systems). Importantly, these two hands are part of the same body, and that body itself is part of multiple contexts, experiencing multiple states of being and perceiving. As Mulvey writes: ‘To translate the stilled image into movement is to see the uncanny nature of the photograph transformed out of one emotional and aesthetic paradigm into another’.²⁹ Linking – and likening – aesthetic and emotional states is a crucial part of the sequences that interest me here, particularly when we recognize their patterns of production and, as a result, our own patterns of reception.

Divisions and connections between perceptive and affective states are also formed through the repetitive patterns of how MRI sequences are staged in television fictional drama. As I noted from the outset, this scene recurs in a particular pattern across various television examples. We begin with a view of the patient from the side, usually below the shoulder or even the waist. The body slides into the machine. In some sequences we cut to the patient’s head as she or he is moving into the machine. From this view (typically without the sound of the machine active), we often move to the technician’s room. Usually the characters are faced with a screen showing images of the brain scan, and this scene itself might be followed with one in which the doctors together examine the MRI films

on lightboards. Or, we might simply cut from the patient to a new scene, marking the seemingly timeless nature of the MRI examination.

Such patterns are evident both in fictional dramas in which the MRI is a mainstay of the programme and those in which it makes only a guest appearance. For instance, in the first episode of *The Sopranos* (HBO, 1999–2007), the head of the family, Tony Soprano, narrates his experience of panic attacks to his newly acquired therapist, culminating in an MRI examination (this event seems to be a metaphor for the ways in which the series will get us ‘into the head’ of a big-time mobster). The scene begins with two views of Tony lying on the MRI table, alternating between a profile and an overhead shot, in an otherwise darkened room. The technician explains to Tony that he may ask to exit the machine if he feels claustrophobic but recommends that he not do so, as they will simply have to begin again. Tony’s wife, Carmela, enters the room – for less rather than more moral support; as Tony glides his way in, the camera cuts to her giving him a little wave. Similar shots and emphases occur in a sequence from ‘Fidelity’, an episode from the first season of *House*.³⁰ The patient lies on the platform that will send her into the machine, one doctor inserts fluid into an IV, and Dr Cameron instructs her: ‘Try to remain as still as possible. The less distortion there is, the more detail we’ll be able to see.’ In each case the scenes offer an exposition on the workings of the machine, even if we do not witness its *actual* workings via duration and sound. In *House*, as in *The Sopranos*, the very workings of the machine emphasize the stillness that necessarily begins with the patient’s body. The camera pans between doctor and patient, with the scene cutting only as the patient begins to move into the machine. In *House*, we can actually see the patient move on the technicians’ monitor, so that we see her body doubled: one view from above on the screen within the screen; the other view of her body in profile just before she glides in. Once her head has entered the machine, we see just her torso (covered in a generic blue hospital blanket) on the monitor in the foreground, while Dr Cameron walks across the scene in the background – away from the patient and into the monitoring room, with its three screens sited in front of the window that separates it from the MRI area (figure 5).

In such instances, the MRI machine (and television screen) allow for a potentially very clean visual experience: neat, stark and sanitary, the setting is devoid of any other distracting detail, drawing our attention to the medical apparatus itself. Given their magnetic nature, the giant white devices stand alone in the room – away from other machines and from nearly everything else. While the physical sets in which we see them are clean, so are their diegetic sequences: because the machines are used to find something on the inside of the body, a sequence involving an MRI does not usually include the spewing of bodily fluids (an eruption from the inside out) that we often see elsewhere on medical shows. Most importantly, the MRI invokes a cycle of appearance and disappearance: the glide of the patient’s body into the belly of the machine

simultaneously reveals what is hidden by the outer core of the body. To do so, it necessarily makes the body itself invisible. This shift in point of view is partly analogous to one's experience inside the machine. MRI technicians commonly recommend that patients close their eyes throughout the process. This is not a bad idea, given the claustrophobic nature of the machine: with my own eyes closed during my exams, I would try to imagine I was somewhere else. This very will to perceive oneself as not inside of the machine may account for a dilemma of representation: how do we show the patient's subjectivity, her point of view, if her eyes are shut? Appearing to be unperceiving, the patient also becomes imperceptible, almost negligible: what is important is what the doctors – and, in turn, the television viewer – can see on the screen. Part and parcel of what Foucault calls the 'clinical gaze', this negligible evidential value of the external body is hardly rare in medical discourses and medical experiences. The development of the clinical gaze was predicated on the organization, and indeed the possession, of knowledge:

What defines the act of medical knowledge in its concrete form is not, therefore, the encounter between doctor and patient, nor is it the confrontation of a body of knowledge and a perception; it is the systematic intersection of two series of information, each homogeneous but alien to each other – two series that embrace an infinite set of separate events, but whose intersection reveals, in its isolable dependence, the *individual fact*.³¹

Or, as Scott Curtis writes, 'Judging from healthcare's current focus, disease seems to be the real object of medicine; the human body only its localization, its *visualization*'.³² For Stacey, 'The patient is viewed simply as a body with a disease'.³³

In the case of MRI sequences, the disappearing body is not visualized outwardly; instead we depend on medical – and the coterminous televisual – technologies to offer an indexical trace in its place. In effect, the patient disappears into her own body. She is at once all body but the body is no longer hers. The 'films' the doctors see are the 'individual facts', displacing the encounter with the patient, or her own experience of her body.³⁴ Over a century and a half, photographic, cinematic and, of course, televisual technologies have perfected this vanishing act; the MRI machine on a television series like *House* extends this act even further, with the ultimate suggestion that medical technologies might swallow us whole.

Such anxieties are particularly acute in stories that blend illness and babies in both *House* and *ER* (NBC, 1994–2006). In one *House* episode entitled 'Maternity', both the MRI and television play significant roles.³⁵ Newborn babies are becoming inexplicably ill in the hospital, and in order to understand the cause of their symptoms the medical team inevitably turns to the MRI. Babies who have just entered the world from the safety of their mothers' bodies are sent back into the belly of the machine. Interestingly, this particular episode is one of the few cases in which we get intensified sound effects. In one scene, a tiny baby is set on

31 Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, p. 30. Emphasis in original.

32 Curtis, 'Still/moving', p. 224. Emphasis in original.

33 Stacey, *Teratologies*, p. 107.

34 The ability to make the body vanish, as Karen Beckman has shown, has a history that can also be traced back to nineteenth-century magic acts and forward through the cinema. Beckman, *Vanishing Women: Magic, Film and Feminism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

35 Season One, Episode Four (2004).

the table; the camera spins from right to left, high above her body. She glides into the machine, as if she is indeed being swallowed back into the darkness of the womb. We go with her, seeing that the machine is lit brightly on the inside. As the baby sleeps peacefully the clamour begins, punctuated by the movement of the camera and the editing of the sequence. The machine (aligned with our perspective) seems to be closing in on the baby but never quite capturing her. The abrupt edits between images generate a sense of near simultaneous disappearance and appearance: an instance of loss and an immediate recovery. On the one hand it seems as if the machine may swallow the baby whole, but on the other the television – and its attendant visual technologies – brings her, and us, back, one way or another. The vanishing act is dependent on a reappearance; with the MRI we see the moving body vanish, and in its wake we substitute the still image of its interior. In fact, as is common to these sequences, our point of view shifts from the patient to the doctor. In this particular case we move from the baby in the MRI to Dr Chase looking at the screen before him, his own reflection caught in the window that divides him from the examination room.

ER offers a similar scene within the MRI, though in this case it is Dr Mark Greene in the machine. Dr Greene has been suffering headaches, optical confusion and mood changes, so he leaves his post in the emergency room to go to the radiology unit for an MRI. Meanwhile his girlfriend, Dr Elizabeth Corday, has fainted while at work, and she is examined in the general ward. A montage sequence cuts between the two, occasionally matching angles and points-of-view – the main difference, of course, is that Greene is not just lying on a hospital bed, but moving into the cavernous body of the MRI. This initial movement is shot similarly to both sequences on *House* and of Tony in *The Sopranos*, emphasizing the patient's sense of being engulfed by the apparatus. In an unusual move, however, we get a brief shot from Mark's own point-of-view of the top of the machine as he is sliding in (perhaps because he is a doctor as well as a patient our own point of view remains consistent with his) (figure 3). Both exams take very little television time, and both patients receive immediate results. Elizabeth learns she is pregnant, and Mark accompanies the radiologist into a room full of MRI films on light boards covering the walls (figure 4). His diagnosis: brain tumour. The proliferation of the still images of his brain produces a similar sense of dispersion that Sobchack sees as inherent to the very nature of electronic media. As Mark and the radiologist move and speak in the foreground of the slices, we too see an inherent contrast between the moving and the still, the focused and the dispersed. Given the shift between narrative segments and media forms, we might claim this sequence as more evidence of the distracted state of the television viewer. And given our visual encounter with the seeming centre of perception – the stilled brain – such sequences narrate an urgency and an ability to reflect upon our encounter with television itself. Constructed and interpellated from the very form of the medium, the television spectator is largely theorized as



Fig. 3.



Fig. 4.

ER, 'Rescue Me' (2000).

³⁶ See Modleski, 'The search for tomorrow'.

both 'distracted' and 'collective'. Because US broadcast television's rhythm is based on commercial interruption and thus narrative segmentation, watching television at once incites and enables a kind of juggling. In traditional domestic space (or at least traditional conceptions of domestic space), television's temporal organization both mimics and can be integrated into the individual's workday.³⁶ At the same time, television directs itself to a collective viewer: if not one family in one home, then a nation full of viewers. These two characteristics go hand in hand. Indeed, the very fantasy of the singular cinematic spectator is predicated on the immersive field of the cinematic space and the classic voyeuristic scene. Television, on the other hand, always admits it has an audience, and the bigger the better. The collective nature of the viewers is matched by the collective span of the texts available on traditional broadcast television: viewers are understood to move fluidly between visual scenes, leaving the space of the fictional scene for the commercial interruption and back again. Or, put another way, the fictional scene (and commercial segment) disappear from view only to reappear again.

House, 'Fidelity' (2004).



Fig. 5.

Point Pleasant, 'Swimming with Boyd' (2005).



Fig. 6.

We are thus trained by television itself to manage multiple texts, forms and time periods. Such juggling requires, however, attention more than distraction – a mode of experience that, as Crary suggests, renders parts of a perceptual field unperceived, but that also allows us to interweave those fields, to see one through the others. Surely this is the case when we see an image of the patient's body via a monitor located within a larger visual field (figures 5 and 6); or on *ER*, when moving figures appear before a wall of still images of a character's brain.

Such an intersection of fields is peculiarly apparent on *House*. What is most provocative about *House's* use of the MRI is the way that it precisely intersects with the television screen, both within the narrative and for the viewer whose vantage allows her to see an array of screens at once. The central character and star of the show, Dr Gregory House (board-certified diagnostician and adorable miscreant) loves television. In fact, it seems he would often rather watch a medical drama than tend to his patients. This tendency is established from the beginning: about halfway through the pilot episode, in the middle of a conversation in the

37 By the end of this episode, he returns to the scene of the television screen, apparently having taken on an ob/gyn patient in order to have access to the better television set.

38 'Living the Dream': Season Four, Episode Fourteen (2008), aired two months after I delivered the first version of this paper.

39 At the time this viewing largely meant *Law and Order*, *Columbo* and *Murder, She Wrote*. This was comfort television – not so much something that didn't make me think, as something that I already knew.

cafeteria with one of his assistants, Dr Foreman, House and the camera repeatedly look away to an episode of *General Hospital* that is playing on a television in the same room. This television drama has an ongoing role on the series, though it is soon fictionalized – no longer *General Hospital* (an ABC soap, after all, whereas *House* is produced by NBC and airs on Fox), it becomes a generic hospital soap. In the second scene of the episode 'Maternity', House watches this generic medical drama in the obstetrician specialists' lounge, where he first hears of the trouble with the babies. This scene opens with a view of a television screen, which overtakes our own, in which a young doctor (who coincidentally resembles House's assistant Chase) tells a female patient that they have received the results from her MRI, and they were 'as we expected'. The camera then pulls back, revealing the television set that frames this scene, and House crosses in front of the screen. Eating a yogurt, he offhandedly diagnoses the patient's malady in one word: 'amnesia'.³⁷ Although it might simply seem to be an instrument of distraction or procrastination, television, like the yo-yo he frequently plays with, appears to aid House's powers of interpretation. This case is made in a brief scene that takes place in another episode from the first season: House walks out of a differential diagnosis, returns to his office, and turns on the television. When Cameron asks, 'Did he just turn on the TV?', his colleague Dr Wilson answers, 'He needs to think'. And in 'Fidelity', when Cameron attempts to practice a little bureaucratic psychology with her colleagues, House immediately diagnoses her real problem: 'Read less; more TV'. In his recommendation, however sardonic, House implies that television, too, is a diagnostic tool, a notion confirmed by the multiple screens we see. In *House* and other dramas, the MRI as displayed on television is an investigative tool that mirrors the nature of television itself. In a case of either great irony or as confirmation of my own diagnosis of this series, this notion is literalized in an episode from the fourth season, in which House 'diagnoses' an actor's brain disorder just by watching him on his regular soap opera.³⁸ When nothing shows up on the actor's scan, House insists that the rest of his staff watch the soap opera; tossing them a set of DVDs, he pithily commands them to 'research'. (Indeed, it is only after continuing to watch the soap that House himself realizes that the origin of the actor's medical narrative is an allergy.) This episode underscores the ways in which diagnosis is a form of interpretation, suggesting in the process that it is also what we do when we watch television.

But I did not watch *House* or *ER* or any other medical dramas when I was preparing for, or recovering from, my brain surgery. Instead, I sought refuge in the familiar and the episodic.³⁹ My turn to *House* came retrospectively. The MRI is a recurring character on *House*, and I was drawn to this repetition on screen and to seeking it out in a working through of the previous seasons on DVD. My viewing seemed to take place in a continuous loop. This looping was not only provoked by the repetitive nature of the television sequences (and, one might say,

⁴⁰ Jonathan Auerbach sees a somewhat similar coincidence between early film narrative and technologies in his essay 'Chasing film narrative: repetition, recursion and the body in early cinema', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 26, no. 4 (2000), pp. 798–820.

⁴¹ As Scott Curtis writes, 'To create a digital cine loop, a CT or MRI scanner captures the information and creates still images. Selected, sequential images . . . are then stored in computer memory and strung together to form a loop. This loop is recorded on videotape or as an MPEG, where it can be examined at leisure [by medical professionals] and compared to the original sequence of isolated images.' Curtis, 'Still/moving', p. 241.

⁴² Stacey, *Teratologies*, pp. 98–9.

television narrative more broadly speaking), but also by the structure of the MRI machine and its resultant films.⁴⁰ Its cylindrical form, indeed, seems matched by the 'loops' of 'films' it digitally produces.⁴¹ Curtis compares this form of looping to that of early cinematic practices, particularly precinematic devices such as the zoetrope. With all of these instances – the MRI scans, the zoetrope, film loops – comes an inherent repetition. In the case of both MRI exams and television viewing, experiences, as well as images, double back on themselves. We enter the machine, itself already formed as a loop of sorts, and we exit on the same line; if we are diagnosed with an illness or the need for surgery, we will return to the machine again and again. Our experience, gliding in and out of the machine while it turns around us to take images of the insides of our bodies, will continue to repeat – until our bodies are deemed clean. Thus my own selective looping of scenes is not unlike the MRI 'slice' – images which, in order to investigate a phenomenon microscopically, exclude a field of perception and isolate a segment of the body. But this is also an attempt to reanimate and reconnect those slices, to integrate them with other experiences, ideas and technologies. In so doing I am practising the forms of decipherment that television's inherent intertextuality produces and trains us to comprehend. The repetition of these images – in television and in this essay – also suggests a return to a scene of trauma.

This is in part my own scene. As Stacey notes, because

the shock of a trauma means that the experience of 'the events' can often not be fully held in the memory, [we experience] both the desire repeatedly to retell the story, and the impossibility of ever achieving a satisfactory sense of having been witnessed. . . . There is often an ambivalent sense of both wanting to 'relive' and 'recapture' traumatic events, and yet there is psychic resistance to such a return.

She goes on, 'What is just as striking as the loss of memory associated with trauma is the endurance and sensation of the consequent "bodily memories". . . . The desire to forget cannot overcome the stubborn presence of bodily memory.'⁴² Stacey is here referring to particular bodies, such as the bodies of cancer survivors. We bear a partial memory of the trauma in our bodies, which in turn leads us to want to retell the story of our experience. I believe that this embodied memory in part accounts for my (magnetic) attraction to the television screen. As Stacey notes, through Freud, these memories have many dimensions. My own include an element of my experience in the MRI and, frankly, watching television after the surgery. Perhaps even more importantly, watching the MRI sequences becomes a means of telling my story, and I long to tell it over and over again. However, while I want to reveal that the body of the theorist – my own body, in this case – may appear through my viewings and reviewings of these scenes, the repetition of these images is already embedded in the text like a televisual fort/da game.

43 One means of working through the death/life scenario is by combining narratives about brains and births, such as in *ER* and *House*.

This fort/da game represents an anxiety about remembering as well as forgetting. These sequences, particularly through their displays of the body's disappearance into the medical apparatus, signify an anxiety about the patient's loss of autonomy, which is never fully mitigated by the attendant 'reassurance' that the patient will be taken care of by the doctor whose point-of-view takes over the scene. These scenes become a means of working through loss – the loss of control over one's body, the potential loss of life.⁴³ But through these acts of appearance and disappearance, the transformation of point-of-view, the balance between the still and the moving, and the multiplication of scenes and plots, the television viewer also gains (or, in effect, reexperiences) her own investigatory powers. Rather than experiencing divided attention, we acquire and indeed embody a form of multiplied attention and perception. Working through these scenes allows us an authority over them, a coming to know, but it is drawn from a perceptual and epistemological experience that is originally lodged in the television itself.

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'How long since you were last alive?'

Fitz and Tennison ten years on

HELEN PIPER

The title of this essay borrows the question memorably posed by *Cracker*'s Dr Edward 'Fitz' Fitzgerald (Robbie Coltrane) to an especially glum gathering of Gamblers Anonymous. Wearied by the drive to turn us all into sanitized mediocre versions of ourselves, the overweight alcoholic chainsmoker urges his fellow addicts back to their old ways, geeing them up from their seats like so many slothful out-of-shape jockeys:

Come on, what are you waiting for? How long's it been, huh? How long's it been since your hands were trembling, your heart was pounding, and your bowels turned to ice? How long since you were last alive?¹

The gesture and rhetoric is typical of the manner in which the character of Fitz – so gifted in expression and demonstrations of personal excess – has often been deployed to articulate social counterpositions more commonly directed at regimes of authority than at crime or criminals, a trope that is arguably central to the programme's extraordinary cultural status. Initially there were three series of *Cracker* made by Granada for ITV and broadcast in the UK between 1993 and 1995, all of which sold well internationally; a one-off episode, 'White Ghost', followed in 1996. The series was remade for a US audience as *Fitz* (1996–97) starring Robert Pastorelli as a somewhat slimmer, more moderate drinker with a penchant for *unlit* cigarettes. From 1996, British production of *Cracker* ceased for an entire decade, before Fitz was brought back from his narrative exile in Australia for a further one-off special called 'Nine-Eleven', broadcast in November 2006. A few weeks

1 *Cracker*, 'To Say I Love You' (Granada, 1993).

later, and not entirely coincidentally, a new and ultimate edition of *Prime Suspect* (Granada) was broadcast, reviving the character of Detective Superintendent Jane Tennison (Helen Mirren) for what was firmly entitled *The Final Act*. Although there had been an edition (the sixth) in this series of multi-part crime dramas in 2003, it too had been out of between regular production since its heyday run between 1991 and 1996.

The latter half of this essay will offer analyses both of these revivals and of their returning protagonists, an exercise that in itself revives some rather interesting questions about the place of fictional characters in the hearts and minds of the television audience. I would argue that British terrestrial television presents itself as a model analytical terrain for the pursuit of these questions, not least because it has proved itself able to support programming of remarkable longevity.² Yet as I shall endeavour to demonstrate, the temporal dimensions of ongoing television pose a problem for television studies, much of which tends to observe an implicit divide between approaches to the text (narrative form, aesthetics, genre) and studies of the medium's various 'audiences' (mass, niche, fan). It is of course the case that the *expressive* potential of series/serial narrative has been recognized by text-oriented studies,³ and there have been innumerable audience response analyses for continuous or returning series and serials. However, the intersection between form, time and affect has, for many good reasons, been more difficult to map. Moreover, although the psychological process of engagement between spectator and fictional characters is an area once picked at like a scab in film studies and even – within a different frame – in philosophical aesthetics, this particular concern has been rather ignored by *textual* investigations of television fiction. I am of course aware that it is implicit to audience-centred studies, yet, as Sonia Livingstone argues in her overview of this field, the antipathy that often exists between critical media theory and ethnography and/or social psychology has tended to work against effective *theorization* of an active television viewer.⁴ Similarly, one premiss of this essay is that the absence of adequate theoretical models of viewing can be highly disabling for the analyst of television texts.

It is neither necessary nor desirable to rehearse the history of the rise and stumble of psychoanalytic models of the cinematic spectator, save to remember that the debates partly set in motion by Laura Mulvey's seminal piece on visual pleasure⁵ eventually ceded, as Jackie Stacey puts it, that

identities are fixed through particular social and historical discourses and representational practices, outside, as well as inside, the cinema. The exclusive focus on the unconscious processes of spectatorship has been unable to explain precisely how such meanings are fixed.⁶

The need to acknowledge the extratextual factors that inform audience readings came in the context of a much discussed 'turn towards reception' as the focus of scholarship across the arts and humanities. In

2 The enduring primetime presence of *Coronation Street* (Granada, 1962-), Bruce Forsyth and David Attenborough, and even the recent revival of *Muffin the Mule* (BBC, 2006-), would seem to prove the point, but there are innumerable other examples.

3 Notably in Glen Creeber, *Serial Television: Big Drama on the Small Screen* (London: British Film Institute, 2004); and, from a different perspective, Jason Mittell, 'Narrative complexity in contemporary American television', *The Velvet Light Trap*, no. 58 (2006), pp. 29–40.

4 Sonia Livingstone *Making Sense of Television: the Psychology of Audience Interpretation*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 12.

5 Laura Mulvey, 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema', *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3 (1975), pp. 6–18.

6 Jackie Stacey *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 32.

spite of this shifting context, work on the *cinematic* textual spectator has continued, albeit as a more marginal enterprise than hitherto, driven by the need to theorize a greater multiplicity of viewing positions than the earlier, more dogmatic psychoanalytic models allowed, and to accommodate the range of contextual factors that sociological investigations were pushing centre stage. From a so-called ‘textualist’ perspective, feminist critics have tended to dominate, determined to break the bind of conceiving the female spectator as locked into a masochistic specular position, and thus also to interrogate issues of fantasy and desire. Adjacent to these, there have been a number of approaches taking cognitive science rather than psychoanalytic theory as their legitimizing framework, a number of which have coalesced with narrative theory.⁷

By persisting with a theoretical model of spectatorship, these cognitive alternatives to psychoanalysis remain open to the charge that was previously levelled at Lacanian models: that they underestimate outside influences on interpretation. Similarly, there is an accusation that response models, on the whole, are significantly less complex and interesting than real viewers, about whom rather less is known. This informs Lynn Pearce’s review of Murray Smith’s *Engaging Characters*, in which she laments the tendency of theories of emotion ‘to concentrate on the “how” rather than the “what” of reader-experience’, resulting in a situation whereby ‘the fantastic spectrum of emotions experienced by readers and viewers in each and every textual engagement remains a vast uncharted wilderness’.⁸ Smith’s response to this review counters that Pearce’s insistence on the ‘excess’ of emotions ‘just seems like so much mystification’, and reiterates the distance between his work and its explicit critique of theories of ‘identification’ that rely upon a ‘positioned spectator’.⁹ He also defends the ontological integrity of the text, for reasons that strike me as broadly in line with Marx’s famous observation that a railway is only potentially a railway if no-one travels on it. This, as Alick West once noted, would also seem to suggest that ‘Shakespeare is only potentially Shakespeare if nobody reads him with appreciation’; yet, he adds, ‘the act of appreciation no more creates his valuable work than the travelling on the railway creates the railway’.¹⁰

My objective here is not to rekindle this dispute for its own sake, not least because the key limitations in Smith’s work of which Pearce complains (namely its interest in meaning-production and its focus on character–spectator relationship) are precisely what make his model eminently suited to my own exploration. Instead, I would concur with Livingstone that theorizing the viewer must *transcend* the paradigmatic dichotomies between passive/active, dominant text/autonomous audience:

The important questions concern the interrelation between the two: how do people actively make sense of structured texts and events; how do texts guide and restrict interpretations?¹¹

⁷ In particular Edward Branigan, *Narrative Comprehension and Film* (London: Routledge, 1992); Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion and the Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); and Greg M. Smith, *Film Structure and the Emotion System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁸ Lynn Pearce, Review of *Engaging Characters*, *Screen*, vol. 37, no. 4 (1996), p. 416.

⁹ Murray Smith, ‘(Dis)engaging characters: a response to Lynne Pearce’, *Screen* vol. 40, no. 3 (1999), pp. 415–18.

¹⁰ Alick West, ‘The relativity of literary value’ (1937), reprinted in Terry Eagleton and Drew Milne (eds), *Marxist Literary Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell 1996), p. 104.

¹¹ Livingstone, *Making Sense of Television*, p. 26.

12 Annette Kuhn, 'Women's genres', *Screen*, vol. 25, no. 1 (1984), pp. 26–7.

13 Murray Smith, 'Altered states: character and emotional response in the cinema', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 33, no. 4 (1994), p. 50.

14 For example, Jason Jacobs, 'Issues of judgement and value in television studies', *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 4, no. 4 (2001), pp. 427–47; Christine Geraghty, 'Aesthetics and quality in popular television drama', *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2003), pp. 25–45.

15 Livingstone, *Making Sense of Television*, p. 103.

If this is by no means a new proposition in television studies, theorization of the interrelationship has tended to be weighted towards either text or audience. Moreover, as Annette Kuhn has argued, the theoretical duality that exists between spectators/social audiences might itself be conceptually important.¹² Notwithstanding this 'productive' separation, two particular difficulties linger for television studies: first, available theories of spectatorship tend to be disproportionately cinematic in their assumptions (having been developed by film scholars with a cinematic experience and the cinematic 'apparatus' in mind); and second, the coextensive theorization of common *textual* strategies still tends to be anchored to assumptions of spectatorship generated by specifically psychoanalytic models of spectatorship. For example, a working concept such as 'point of view' does not exist as a neutral analytical tool precisely because it was considered to be a technique fundamental to what Mulvey theorized as an essentially masculine address. According to this logic, 'POV, as the pre-eminent cinematic device for the representation of looking, is thus intrinsically value-laden'.¹³ The same would apply to the orthodoxy that surrounds the Classical Hollywood vocabulary of 'looks', shot/reverse-shot, and so on, all of which make assumptions about the spectator that seem to endure independently of the grand narrative of cine-psychoanalysis which gave rise to them.

The pressing need for a serviceable analytical vocabulary is reiterated by what may be a turning tide in television studies, signalled by scholars such as Christine Geraghty and Jason Jacobs, who have lately attempted to recentre the text as an object of analysis, arguing in particular for the importance of close reading and the reaffirmation of aesthetics.¹⁴ If the perceived need for aesthetic critique seems a paradoxical place from which to call for a theoretical model of viewership, it is perhaps because we cannot have one without implying the other. Just as, logically, a valorizing appraisal of a text infers a position on what constitutes cultural value, so all aesthetic ideologies make assumptions about receivers (whether passive, active, distracted, oppressed or subversive) and what the arts should provide them with (critique, opposition, liberation, expression, enlightenment, diversion, and so on). Similarly, any form of textual contemplation always conjures up and implicates a spectator who, in spite of being a figurative concept, is never a material being but a position. However, in the absence of a consensual model (or a set of cognitive tools) it is a figure that might only be derived from the critic. No matter how self-reflexive the critic or 'critic-as-fan', the value of her/his enterprise often resides in the insights it yields for the wider experience. Yet, as Livingstone notes, the particular example of children's programmes and the *child* audience serve to emphasize how 'as soon as we conceptualise the viewer separately from the critic, the need for a psychology of the viewer becomes obvious'.¹⁵

For the textual analyst, it is perhaps not so much a question of fixing a singular model of a television viewer (psychological or cognitive) as of

allowing concurrent research into a theorized viewer continually to inform the lexicon of theoretical concepts used to unpack the processes of viewing that a text or series of texts invite. In this spirit, the following analyses of *Prime Suspect* and *Cracker* will make pragmatic use of a few of the deceptively simple concepts to have emerged from the interstices of cognitive science and narrative theory, although firmly within a contextual emphasis on these two crime dramas as *returning* series rather than standalone texts. This context clearly has extratextual and metatextual ramifications for actual viewers (including me), but I can, unavoidably, merely speculate about the general experience of these. Insofar as a critical vocabulary is concerned, one great advantage of the concepts and schemas from the cognitive tradition is that they tend to avoid the ambiguity surrounding the theorization of 'identification'. The latter has been a particularly problematic, yet pivotal, concept for screen analysis, often used to refer to a whole spectrum of engagements from star–fan relationships (which to Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst imply 'that members of the audience, in imagination, want to fuse identities with that of the star')¹⁶ to a more abstract emotional sense of empathy with a character subject position. As Noël Carroll has argued, however much the inferences of character identification might be qualified by critics, its 'core-meanings . . . really seem to require that I feel at one with or identical to another', and it is primarily for this reason that he recommends the concept be discarded altogether in critical discourse.¹⁷

By proposing more precise categories of response, Smith hopes to retain some of the possibilities that can be implied by 'identification', but to do so by refining an understanding of the 'evaluative attitudes which underlie emotions', notably empathy, sympathy and antipathy. He borrows Richard Wollheim's distinction between 'central imagining' and 'acentral imagining', which in turn maps onto 'the distinction between empathy (sharing another person's or character's emotional state) and sympathy (maintaining a positive attitude to a person or character without experiencing their emotional state)'.¹⁸ Unlike Carroll, for whom fictive engagement is an exclusively acentral process, Smith does admit to possibilities of 'central imagining', especially of empathy. Thus, although the logic behind his 'structure of sympathy' is that it is 'on the whole an acentral structure', it does accommodate occasions when viewers may engage in 'a form of imaginative "simulation" of the mental states of characters'.¹⁹ Clearly this is a more complex model in the range of possibilities it permits, but the continued emphasis on acentrality still destabilizes aesthetic/theoretical dichotomies such as illusion/critical detachment, and effectively helps to decentre the self (personal identity and personal preoccupations) in the entirety of that complex cultural transaction that we commonly refer to as spectatorship. If the self is decentred, one could argue that all the sociocultural contextual factors believed to determine 'personal' interpretation (gender, race, sexuality, class, and so on) will also be decentred (although

¹⁶ Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst, *Audiences: a Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination* (London: Sage, 1998), p. 65.

¹⁷ Noël Carroll *The Philosophy of Horror – or Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1990), p. 94.

¹⁸ Smith, '(Dis)engaging characters'.

¹⁹ Smith, 'Altered states', p. 39.

never removed, for they will of course still exert variable degrees of constraint). Although this does not return us to a reactionary model of the dominant text, emphasizing that imaginative engagement is a complex activity by a viewing agent rather than the exclusively 'central' imagining of the private self, it could actually make more palatable the categorical distinction between model viewer and actual viewer, not least because it drives a wedge between personal subjectivity and the emotions aroused in a subject by the *thought* of something. It might also reconcile those made uncomfortable by the relative displacement of the text as a source of meaning, such as Jan Simons, who once complained:

one wonders what the point of watching television is if television merely keeps its audience trapped in narcissistic projections that confirm already existing 'social interests' and the 'meanings' that are determined by those interests.²⁰

What is needed is an approach that makes it possible to speculate on the generalized processes and shared experiences of reception without forever being stymied by the realities of individual difference, and one which also makes it possible to talk – without cringing – of a 'preferred reading' at the same time as one acknowledges the presence of those elements that Smith terms 'the beholder's share' or 'the imaginative activity of the viewer'.²¹

Smith's 'structure of sympathy' comprises three levels of engagement that, he argues, are often conflated under the notion of 'identification': recognition, alignment and allegiance.²² As these are all concepts to which I am particularly indebted, I shall briefly explain Smith's delineations. 'Recognition' is the process by which a spectator 'constructs' or apprehends various textual traits as 'a character', and this is mimetic in that the traits are assumed to correspond to analogical ones found in the real world. 'Alignment' is the process by which spectators are positioned in relation to characters by means of 'spatial alignment' and 'subjective access' (for example, to a character's thoughts and feelings). 'Allegiance' refers to the moral evaluation of a character by the spectator, and this can have both cognitive and affective dimensions.²³

I will return to each of these concepts in my analyses below, but I should reiterate that because of the structural emphasis on acentrality, the three processes of recognition, alignment and allegiance seem, in my interpretation at least, to be states of emotional *hypothesis* and thus more intellectually determined and qualified than would be assumed by the premiss of 'sutured identification' in film theory (which implies that there could be no position or pleasure outside the realist continuity characteristics of classic narrative). Acentral assimilation on the part of a spectator requires her/him to understand *why* a protagonist is feeling or responding in a certain way rather than replicating her/his mental state. The model is formulated in such a way as to admit that this imaginative state can, nevertheless, give rise to real empathetic emotions.

²⁰ Jan Simons, in Thomas Elsaesser, Jan Simons and Lucette Bronk (eds), *Writing For the Medium* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1994), pp. 82–3. Simons is here taking particular exception to the work of John Fiske.

²¹ Smith, 'Altered states', p. 36.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 35, pp. 34–56.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

²⁴ The term is originally David Bordwell's, cited and demonstrated in detail in Smith, *Engaging Characters*, p. 118.

²⁵ Smith, 'Altered states', p. 40.

²⁶ Smith, *Engaging Characters*, p. 110.

²⁷ *Inspector Morse* (CIT and Carlton, 1987–2000). Revealed in the penultimate episode 'Death is Now My Neighbour' (1996).

Smith takes care to insist that his model 'structure of sympathy' has been formulated with the cinematic character in mind, and certainly to borrow his schema for television analysis will require a shift of emphasis, not least to accommodate the temporal particularity of series and serial television, and possible shifts in the relative importance of intertextual factors, or the 'primacy effect',²⁴ that inform the apprehension of character. Of the cognitive concepts discussed so far, the one that most clearly needs further development is that of 'recognition' – 'the perception of a set of textual elements, in film typically cohering around the image of a body'.²⁵ Individuation will make a character distinctive; reidentification will recognize the same character in different contexts at different times; and together they constitute 'recognition of that character'.²⁶ Nevertheless, and useful as these distinctions are, even Smith's elaboration of the 'recognition' process falls somewhat short of accounting for the *depth* of emotions triggered by the opportunity to observe the return of a well-known and enigmatic character. One may suppose that reidentification can be emotionally enriched by successive encounters because they will in turn evoke memories, for example of previous engagement with the same character, pleasures of knowledge/expertise of that character's history, and the prospect of new knowledge (just think of the glee of Morse fans on finally discovering his Christian name²⁷), as well as memories, of course, of aesthetic pleasures past and those to be (ritually) repeated.

The return of both Fitz and Tennison to British television screens after a long absence (other than in ubiquitous repeats) invites a degree of temporal reflection about the intervening years, similar perhaps to what one might feel when encountering an old acquaintance. More specifically, as I shall show in the case of *Prime Suspect 7: The Final Act*, the intervening passage of time is *thematically* central, as this drama is in many respects an extended meditation on a life spent. Similarly, in the last one-off episode of *Cracker*, Fitz makes a number of selfconscious allusions to the changes wrought during his absence from Manchester, and his own changing status within his grownup family. A clear causal link is inferred by the juxtaposition of a scene in which he attempts to track down a supply of Viagra online with one in which he rather eagerly accepts an invitation to return to work for Manchester CID. During his semi-retirement in Australia, it would seem Fitz has become both literally and figuratively impotent. By increasing awareness of the way in which time has brought changes for these familiar characters, both texts seem to invite a similar process of temporal self-reflection on one's own personal developments in the interim.

The central conceit of a crime drama that privileges the sharp insight of a psychological profiler, such as *Cracker*, is that such insight can indeed be a match for criminal pathology, implying that far from being unfathomable, social malaise has both causes and outcomes that might have been foreseen. The maverick status of Fitz (a clinical psychologist constantly at odds with most of the senior members of the police force

that employs him) is one consistent with longstanding traditions of popular heroes. It tapped into the distrust of policing and the establishment that was widespread in the recession-hit early 1990s under an increasingly tired Conservative government and in relation to the revelations of a number of earlier miscarriages of justice. The opening credit sequence of 'Nine-Eleven' juxtaposes shots of Fitz with news footage of the ongoing war in Iraq and the reported death of British soldiers, thus promising an equation of sorts: a familiar, fictional (and typically correct) diagnostic problem-solver plus a highly topical, intractable, extradiegetic international crisis. That this promise should be reneged upon – apart from a few incidental references and as justification for some anti-American sentiment, the Iraq war actually turns out to be something of a pretext – perhaps helps to explain some of the critical disappointment which greeted 'Nine-Eleven', although its dramatic failings are not my focus here. The point is that 'recognition' in this sequence, at least for fans of the series, could be mobilizing memories of Fitz's prowess and societal insight in the context of the complex emotions aroused daily by the news.

A familiar structural trope of all episodes of *Cracker* is that Fitz's private life tends to unravel in parallel to a murder investigation, often mirroring the dysfunction of the murderer and developments in her/his diegetic life. In 'Nine-Eleven', scenes of the first murder (of an American standup comedian in a club toilet) are juxtaposed with scenes of Fitz in a Manchester taxi commenting on the huge building programme that has taken place in the city over the last decade. Because the viewer actively witnesses both this and the next crime, while being given clear spatial access to (and sometimes optical alignment with) the murderer himself, an unambiguous moral framework of returning hero/murderer at large is made more complex by the emotional insight offered into the disturbed culprit. A further narrative complication is introduced (towards the second commercial break) when the murderer is revealed in his police uniform; and again in the next part when he is assigned to protect the mother/wife of the first two victims. Interspersed with these plot developments are scenes in which the extent of the murderer's disturbed psyche is revealed, as we discover he was a former soldier who served a traumatic tour in Northern Ireland. This ratcheting of tension (fear of his capabilities and damaged state) happens in tandem with scenes of emotional alignment and insight (a cue for sympathy but not empathy), and thus complicates but does not alter the moral structure of allegiance. This is where the language of 'identification' would have impeded analysis, as there are a number of quite different viewer/character relations on offer. Typically, this episode of *Cracker* invites temporary *alignment* with, and ultimate moral *allegiance* in support of, Fitz; emotional *empathy* with his endlessly shortchanged family (his wife Judith and the grandchild he supposedly came over to spend time with but has little chance to see); as well as an optical/spatial alignment with,

and sympathy for, the murderer, who is clearly a victim of an earlier 'war'.

For Fitz, the identity of the murderer is revealed some time prior to the structural climax of the investigation/chase, although there is very little tension or anticipation around this revelation. Halfway into a scene in which the senior police team is unable to offer any leads to the mother/wife of the two victims, Fitz steps forward and, with typical accuracy, surmises the type of man they are looking for. His presentation is watched through the glass office walls by Kenny Archer (Anthony Flanagan), a serving police officer whom the audience know is the culprit, although he has attracted no official suspicion until now. A sequence of looks – Kenny's fixed stare and Fitz's eyeline – is interspersed with shots of residential Manchester and Archer's flashbacks of war service. Whether or not Fitz's look is directed at Kenny or at others in the room is ambiguous, but immediately afterwards he casually requests a word with Archer. Until this point the most obvious function of the sequence is to contrast Fitz's prowess with the smug inadequacy of DI Walters (Richard Coyle), but suddenly the narrative jumps to Fitz effectively interviewing the chief suspect. The legitimacy of this implausible leap relies entirely on the degree to which Fitz's judgement appears to match the privileged foreknowledge of the audience. This is achieved partly through spatial alignment with the 'villain'; it has little to do with either optical or spatial alignment with Fitz and everything to do with the trust *already vested* in him. It is this trust that equates to a system of moral allegiance that may or may not be due to his political persuasion, gift of expression or capacity for logical reason, but given the relative lack of such development in this episode, must almost certainly be inherited from earlier narratives. Again this foregrounds the significance of the notion of 'reidentification' and the temporal properties of the television drama series, matters to which I will return shortly.

Old School, that's Tennison. On the force what – thirty, thirty-five years? Battered, burnt-out. Dinosaurs. What did they do when they leave? They drank themselves to death that's what.²⁸

Prime Suspect has typically been examined in the context of gender, although the 'radicalism' of installing a woman in a typically male role (senior murder investigator) has probably been exaggerated.²⁹ As Sean O'Sullivan points out, 'drama is trailing reality',³⁰ as the real blood had already been spilt in professional gender battles of the 1970s and 1980s, even if in British television Tennison's route to power had only *Juliet Bravo* (BBC, 1980–85) and *The Gentle Touch* (LWT, 1980–84) to light the way. Nevertheless, the sophisticated private/professional conflicts determined for DCI Jane Tennison and manifest in Helen Mirren's nuanced performance, and the institutionally complex sexism she is seen to encounter, have arguably made her character a cultural marker in its

²⁸ DCS Mitchell in *Prime Suspect 7: The Final Act* (2006).

²⁹ See, for example, Lez Cooke, *British Television Drama: a History* (London: British Film Institute, 2003), pp. 185–7; Creeber, *Serial Television*; Mary Eaton, 'A fair cop? Viewing the effects of the canteen culture in *Prime Suspect* and *Between the Lines*', in D. Kidd-Hewitt and R. Osbourne (eds), *Crime and the Media: the Postmodern Spectacle* (London: Pluto, 1995).

³⁰ Sean O'Sullivan, 'UK policing and its television portrayal: 'law and order' ideology or modernising agenda?', *The Howard Journal*, vol. 44, no. 5 (2005), pp. 504–26.

31 Andrew Billen, 'We shall not see her like again', *New Statesman*, 23 October 2006, p. 44.

32 At a press conference in September 2006, Tennison's alleged onscreen death was thereafter widely reported as fact, even by television reviewers, much to their later embarrassment when it turned out not to be the case.

33 From the Channel 4 list of '100 Greatest Sex Symbols', <http://www.channel4.com/programmes/the-100-greatest-sex-symbols/articles/the-results> [accessed 20 March 2009].

own right. In this most self-reflexive of editions, *The Final Act* not only meditates on a life spent in a particularly brutalizing sort of public service, but in so doing stakes a claim for its own historical significance. This was not lost on one reviewer, who mourned 'we shall not see her like again'.³¹

An appeal to emotional recognition and to curiosity about the fate of the character of Tennison was actively made in considerable prepublicity and faux leaked storylines, such as Mirren's infamous 'slip' that this would be Tennison's last ever outing unless she came 'back from the dead'.³² The opening shots of Tennison in *The Final Act* are also redolent of her previous appearances, but although instantly recognizable this is not altogether the character once described as 'every man's fantasy powerful woman'.³³ Instead, her pallor is as harsh and grey as the lighting as she wakes on a sofa in her pyjamas. The scene then progresses at a markedly slow, gloomy pace, in contrast to the intercut shots of the frantic discovery of a missing girl. Tennison investigates her own night before, piecing it together from clues: a bruise on her forehead, an empty bottle of spirits on the coffee table, the telephone left off the hook, the toilet seat left up. The camera dwells on the material evidence. Dressed and ready to leave, she opens a virtually empty fridge to find a spent carton of orange juice, obliging her to down a tall glass of vodka undiluted. The entire mise-en-scene (her work suit, the kitchen) is cast in monochrome shades and lit by a steely grey light: this may recognizably be the Tennison of former episodes, but older and worse for wear than we have seen her before. Feasibly, a history of allegiance with this character, developed by previous series, might in itself generate an expectation of empathy, but Tennison's evident uncertainty about herself in this sequence is contagious. Moreover, although Mirren is clearly also *performing* anxiety, the full impact of the sequence assumes prior knowledge, as it depends upon a viewer's ability to hazard a comparative assessment of how her character has deteriorated. The invitation is to judge, albeit with compassion, rather than to align (perceptually or emotionally). It also reinforces the theatrical resonance of the title (*Final Act*) for it is now possible to infer the parallel between Tennison and a classic tragic hero approaching that critical moment of recognition (of the flawed self) that Aristotle called 'agnorisis'.

It becomes clear that this final drama is also about Tennison herself, elevating the generic trope of a detective's dysfunctional private life to the centre of the narrative. This, her last case before retirement, concerns a missing teenage girl, Sally Sturdy, and involves a range of potential suspects including the girl's father Tony Sturdy (Gary Lewis), two teenage friends called Curtis and Lester, and her head teacher Sean Phillips (Stephen Tompkinson). Familiar to fans of *Prime Suspect* is the manner in which certainties about a given subject at any time are then confounded by new forensic discoveries. Also well precedented – but rarely to this extent – is the narrative intermarriage of personal and public storylines, although in this instance Tennison's private tragedy is

not so much juxtaposed with as played out through the murder investigation. Particularly important in narrative terms is her unusual fondness for fourteen-year-old Penny, Sally's best friend and the daughter of Sean Phillips. At various points in the plot, Tennison's ill-judged and badly-managed relationship with Penny becomes a figurative means of dramatizing the detective's squaring up to her younger, lost, self. Also crucial is Tennison's relationship with her father (Frank Finlay), the man to whom she was once the little girl he wanted never to witness 'what people were capable of', and whose death – in a very logistical sense – precipitates one of the crisis points in the narrative. It is after leaving him in hospital that Tennison is confronted by the gun-wielding Curtis in a sequence that concludes the first episode with the shooting of her old adversary, now friend and fellow alcoholic, Bill Otley (Tom Bell).

Throughout the first of the two episodes, Tennison's performance at work is consistently undermined by small but telling narrative incidents and her noticeably growing awareness of her own fallibility. On one occasion she is shown sitting behind the steering wheel of her car as she unwraps and eats a supermarket sandwich. The camera is positioned apparently inside the car, by the dashboard facing the passenger seat, but we then cut to a shot of the same action, this time with the camera positioned head-on, observing her through the barrier and frame of the rain splattered windscreen, at the very moment that she takes a swig from a quarter-bottle of wine (figures 1–2). The edit between the two frames also precipitates a few ominous-sounding bars from the musical score, thus aurally as well as visually disengaging the viewer from her/his initial spatial alignment and encouraging a certain amount of retrospection regarding any allegiance with this character, or perhaps with the way this character is developing. It is an apparently small incident that demonstrates the aesthetic strategy which seems expressly designed to complicate (and sometimes confound) the preconceived emotional viewing systems of alignment and allegiance in this first episode. The detachment and possible position of moral judgement elicited by the sequence are immediately reinforced when Tennison (with Penny also now in the car) narrowly avoids crashing into an oncoming vehicle, retorting 'I'm not drunk' to the girl's instant accusation.

Shortly afterwards, an interrogation of Sally's father (at this point under suspicion) ends in disarray when he points out that it is Tennison, not he, who smells of alcohol. Sturdy's continued antipathy towards her reinforces an ambiguous narrative opposition between them that contrasts self-consciously with the moral certainties of previous relationships she has had with her prime suspects. Nevertheless, towards the end of the first episode he shows her a home videotape of Sally kissing her head teacher after a basketball win. It is a moment that seems to offer itself as a narrative turning point, a new investigative lead and an opportunity for Tennison to salvage respect, yet it is foreclosed when she rejects the evidence instantly, urging Sturdy to take it no further.



Fig. 1.



Fig. 2.

The edit seems designed to complicate the viewing systems of alignment and allegiance. *Prime Suspect 7: The Final Act* (2006).

Throughout this first episode, the privileged spatial access the viewer is granted to Tennison becomes less a means of supporting a system of allegiance than of offering privileged insight to the distress she feels regarding her *own separation from* the woman she once was. In Smith's terms, this private duality and self-disgust provides the opportunity for a 'narrative system of moral orientation' that simultaneously invites contemplation and retrospection, and generates qualified sympathy rather than automatic allegiance to the protagonist. In the second episode, however, the narrative and moral orientation shifts markedly, this time supported by less ambiguous methods of optical alignment. Broadcast a

34 Billen, 'We shall not see her like again', p. 44.

week later, it anticipates a rather differently configured recognition of Tennison than that anticipated by the first episode, given that she has now been reestablished as vulnerable, engaged in private struggle and, ironically, as an increasingly fallible and unreliable party. Nevertheless, this second episode opens with some frantic chase sequences, suggesting a new pace with less time for the maudlin introspections of the previous week, and indeed, Tennison herself happily shifts gear and displays sharpened instincts in the search for Curtis. When the police finally track him down to his sister's apartment, they arrive just after his young niece has shot him on the toilet, precipitating a chance for the old Jane to reemerge and demonstrate that, as Billen puts it, in spite of being 'the cop supposedly without maternal instinct, [she] knows how to talk her down'.³⁴

Although the storyline of Tennison's private anguish and grief continues to unfold at a markedly slower pace than that reserved for the professional investigation, it occupies less screen time overall and there are more reminders of Tennison's professional competence to mitigate the spectacle of her deterioration. There are some exquisitely understated moments that complicate easy judgements: a purchased bottle of whisky left unopened on the table; the ring of her mobile phone as her father's coffin is ceremonially brought into the crematorium; the sincerity of her promise to Sturdy ('I give you my word'); the simple gesture of faith in her from a colleague who refuses to believe that she would offer alcohol to Penny, in spite of the evidence that she herself had been drinking. 'She stole my heart', muses Tennison of Penny. 'Who'd have thought . . .' An audience might well infer that it is precisely being in possession of a heart that drove her to drink in the first place.

Tennison's fallibility gradually becomes less related to alcoholism and more to her affection for Penny, a girl who repeatedly reminds her of her younger self, and against whom the evidence is mounting. Penny's intense affection for her father (despite learning of his affair with Sally), her apparently irrational rejection of her mother, and her strong moral instincts (even though she is later revealed as the murderer), not only offer insights into Tennison by stressing the totality of her life (and not just her career) but also complicate further the moral ambiguities of the old binaries between officer/suspect and crime/policing. In this context, the rollcall of Tennison's career achievements rings rather hollow, and there is both wry humour and a conscious allusion to an earlier episode in the exchange between Tennison and Taff:

- Taff: First female DCI
- Tennison: First *Jane Tennison* DCI
- Taff: Sorry Ma'am
- Tennison: Don't call me Ma'am, I'm not the bloody Queen.

The continual narrative association between Tennison's professional achievements and personal scars would seem to emphasize the price she

35 Libby Brooks, 'Struck down in her prime', *The Guardian*, 24 October 2006.

36 Kuhn is referring to the characters Cagney and Lacey, in 'Women's genres: melodrama, soap opera and theory', in Charlotte Brunsdon, Julie D'Acci and Lynn Spigel (eds), *Feminist Television Criticism: a Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 162.

37 Smith, '(Dis)engaging characters'.

38 Brooks 'Struck down in her prime'.

39 Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 94.

has paid for others: for the victims avenged, the crimes averted. Viewed positively, one could read it as a tribute, an elegy to a generation that has made it unnecessary for Penny's generation to fight the same professional battles. The converse is equally possible, of course, typified by Libby Brooks's response to the programme, which saw 'a depressing ending for a character who was emblematic of women's struggle to succeed in the workplace'.³⁵

Yet it is not necessarily a question of positive or negative imaging, for as Annette Kuhn once noted of some rather different female fictional characters, these

cannot be conceptualized as realistic images of women, but as textual constructions of possible modes of femininity . . . they do not function as role models but are symbolic realizations of feminine subject positions with which viewers can identify in fantasy.³⁶

The complex system of allegiance developed in this ultimate *Prime Suspect* offers shifting positions of relative sympathy with Tennison for her sacrifices, whilst eliciting distress at the price she has paid. It fits, in this respect, with what Smith calls a 'graduated' moral structure – as opposed to a Manichaean one – for it 'situates characters within a more finely-calibrated spectrum of moral gradations, and thus tends to elicit mixed and qualified emotions' that marry up with psychological states of approval and disapproval.³⁷ Remarkably, Tennison's present condition of loneliness and alcoholism becomes contingent rather than defining: this is not a study of an alcoholic, as her alcoholism is but the dramatic manifestation of the emotional price she is paying, both as an officer who gave too much and as a woman who forewent too much. Or, as Brooks points out: 'The early Tennison knew what she wanted, and went for it gladly. Her final incarnation was a woman of regret.'³⁸

As I argued earlier, recent reaffirmation of the televisual text as the object of critical study may also lay bare the theoretical vacuum that could undermine its own integrity as critique. For television studies, it is not so much a question of disentangling a complex legacy of theoretical spectatorship as of beginning to generate a working vocabulary with which students may develop more sophisticated analyses of television aesthetics and meaning-production. Only the most superficial notion of the aesthetic would attempt to configure one without the other. As Terry Eagleton argues in his recent defence of theory:

At their most useful, critical concepts are what allow us access to works of art, not what block them off from us. They are ways of getting a handle on them. Some of them may be more effective handles than others, but that distinction does not map on to the difference between theory and non-theory.³⁹

Smith's tripartite notion of engagement, and the deceptively simple distinction between alignment and allegiance, does not purport to restate

⁴⁰ Alan Clarke, "You're nicked!" Television police series and the fictional representation of law and order', in Dominic Strinati and Stephen Wagg (eds), *Come on Down? Popular Media Culture in Post-war Britain* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1992), p. 250.

⁴¹ Richard Sparks *Television and the Drama of Crime: Moral Tales and the Place of Crime in Public Life* (Oxford: Open University Press, 1992).

the dominance of the text or to elide the diversity of possible readings and emotional responses. What it does offer, paradoxically perhaps, is an insight into the workings of certain dramatic strategies common to a genre of which *Cracker* and *Prime Suspect* are exemplars. It is, for example, somewhat orthodox to refer to leading investigators such as Fitz or Tennison as individualistic heroes 'within the context of the supportive team',⁴⁰ an assumption that invites comparison with the 'hero' in a classical (Hollywood and/or Tragic) sense. Yet does this not make them anomalous in the context of widely used strategies of ensemble characterization more usually associated with television drama series and serials? Is it not remarkable that they exist at all in a television landscape in which communities and groups have displaced the individual protagonist as (heroic) subject? Viewed differently, however, they are not so exceptional, and the complexity of the emotional engagement elicited by these dramas might sit more comfortably with a reconception of the detective as more closely analogous to a literary narrator/agent figure, for example. It is more plausible to conceive of Tennison and Fitz not simply as the active subjects of a narrative but as active agents that mediate between the viewer and the criminal/mimetic world of crime. Their mythological function is arguably to serve as the figurable means by which viewers may safely encounter their anxieties about the social sphere, as the narrative mechanism by which – to a greater or lesser extent – these fears are ultimately assuaged and, of course, as the privileged voice of public discord.⁴¹ Fitz's regular emotional outbursts against the 'long boring straight road' preferred by authorities and institutions expresses widespread popular sentiment rather than evoking it on his own behalf, as does Gene Hunt's contempt for political correctness (*Life on Mars* [BBC, 2006–07], *Ashes to Ashes* [BBC, 2008–]) or DI Jack Frost's irritation with police bureaucracy (*A Touch of Frost* [Yorkshire Television, 1992–]). What is interesting about Smith's conceptual framework is not that it gives rise to this particular hypothesis, for it does not, but that it gives it space in a way that neither conventional hero-driven narrative models nor psychoanalytical theories of positioned spectators and identification have been comfortably able to permit, perhaps because they imply too consistent a relationship between identification and ideological allegiance.

Complex characters will elicit complex emotional responses from viewing subjects, and the process is constantly enriched by renewed engagement. Such a relationship is distinctively temporal: it is defined by its duration and its recurrence, and is informed by the interplay of familiarity and surprise, predictability and unpredictability, that characterize the sequential structures of the storylines. One problem with translating cognitive models of emotional engagement for television drama is not – as some have claimed – that they decontextualize viewing subjects in terms of their personal identities but that, as such models are often so tied to the cues of the particular text in hand, they

42 Milly Buonanno, *The Age of Television: Experiences and Theories* (Bristol: Intellect, 2008), p. 121.

43 Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Volume I (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Buonanno, *The Age of Television*, p. 125.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 121.

tend to pay little attention to the prior accumulation of viewer knowledge or to the intensification of relationships over time. Even as we shift towards a downloading and DVD-watching culture, the familiar temporal patterns of serial viewing are likely to remain central to the experience of television drama.

Taking a speculative cue from poststructuralism, Milly Buonanno recently revived the case for television seriality as 'elemental' and puts it 'at the service of the inextinguishable human desire for immortality'.⁴² Although Ricoeur famously argued this of all narrative, Buonanno hypothesizes that serial forms in particular arise out of the need (exposed by individualism and secularism) to exorcize fears of inevitable death by helping us to defer, indeed 'to forget the transience of our existence'.⁴³ Germane here is her distinction between the different temporal regimes that characterize the series and the serial. The episodic series, with its typical reliance on the 'cumulative adventures of recurring heroes', accommodates 'autonomous and conclusive segments' and is typically achronological and cyclical. The serial, by contrast, includes unfinished segments, ordered by chronological continuity and in a strict interrelated sequence. Although the formal distinctions are familiar, Buonanno emphasizes the differences in the world view they produce: whereas the serial portrays a world that is 'evolutionary and metamorphic', the series represents 'an iterative world, preserved (relatively) from the metamorphic effect of time'.⁴⁴

Although I would position both *Cracker* and *Prime Suspect* as series (even if a single show sometimes stretched over two or three instalments), they both accommodate serial elements. Limited progression in the protagonists' private lives does occur, often paralleling developments in the episodic plot. This 'progress' nevertheless conforms to a cyclical pattern: Tennison is promoted, her personal/familial/sexual relationship(s) break down; Judith leaves Fitz, then comes back again; Fitz gives up gambling, then starts again. The world view is evolutionary yet predictable, progressive yet familiar. Major personal developments that threaten closure (such as Fitz's move to Australia) generally take the form of reported action inferred to have occurred between one series and another, as indeed does the process (if not the evidence) of Tennison's deterioration which, although hinted at in *Prime Suspect* 6, is visibly complete by the final edition. That ultimate closure should come so close in the ultimate edition of *Prime Suspect* simply makes this edition all the more remarkable, and the theatrical connotation of its title (*The Final Act*) all the more apt. By contrast, the character of Fitz is denied such progress and his tragedy is such that in spite of possessing superhuman insight into the psyche of others, he is condemned to relive forever his own failings and reenact his own behavioural pathologies. He is to be perpetually stranded in the Fourth Act.

This mix of series and serialization suggests a possible theorization of these two particular shows as a paradox of evolutionary yet cyclical logic, and the status or 'fate' of both characters is crucial to what

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 131–2.

⁴⁶ 'The Remorseful Day', *Inspector Morse* (Carlton, 2000).

⁴⁷ David Gauntlett and Annette Hill, *TV Living: Television Culture and Everyday Life* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 35.

⁴⁸ Pearce, *Review of Engaging Characters*, p. 418.

Buonanno describes boldly as the 'life-giving potential' of television seriality. Each form offers a different temporal subterfuge. Whereas 'delay and removal of the ending are the prerogative of the serial', the series is able to restore 'the mythical concept of cyclical time and – through the eternal return to the present – sets the suspension of time itself against its unstoppable flow'.⁴⁵ According to this logic, the threatened 'closure' of *Prime Suspect 7* would have meant more than the loss of a periodic viewing pleasure; indeed it would shatter this reassuring suspension and reveal the instability of an iterative world view. It is not altogether surprising that for all the episode's finality and tragic cadence, Tennison was spared the onscreen death that befell Chief Inspector Morse a few years earlier.⁴⁶ Instead viewers are left with a closing sequence in which she simply walks away from the police station, thus demonstrating a subterfuge of her own as she evades her own retirement party and misses the ritual humiliation of the male stripper in police uniform.

Buonanno's insistence on the elemental may seem indiscriminate (to both viewer and text) and her thesis may well be dated in its debt to structuralism, but it does help to characterize the particular psychic temporal nature of the engagement between viewer and returning series. Television, particularly in its series and serial forms, tends to seep into patterns of daily life and, as Gauntlett and Hill argue, 'is often assigned a kind of everyday priority which means that other interactions take place around and through the watching of it'.⁴⁷ A life measured out in weekly instalments might leak away as unremarkably as the non-televised case histories of a detective's career, precisely because that is the nature of repetition: only an interruption, a shift (and therefore a revival), demand retrospection. The elaborately meditative preoccupations of both these series' revivals constitute an express invitation to reflect on the personal and shared social experience of the passage of time, and they are also, by their very existence, acting as cultural markers of a more routine sort than the 'landmark' historical events such as 9/11, the millennium, or the death of Diana. Although ethnography has insisted that we recognize the centrality of identity to processes of reception, far less attention has been paid to 'time' and longevity of engagement, suggesting that Pearce's injunction 'to chart the wilderness before we seek to tame it'⁴⁸ might be a more involved and longstanding commitment than previously undertaken, just as textual analyses must be located within a wider field of reference. However, I am not convinced by the argument that textual analysis should be endlessly deferred whilst ethnographers and social psychologists come up with a model of long-term viewing, when the important thing is that the respective projects inform one another rather than compete for priority. Alongside mistrust of theory and contempt for the work of the critic, there seems to have arisen a certain resistance to 'speculation' of any sort about the work of the text and its role in 'our' lives, although I cannot think of a more sensible way of charting such complex imbrications of sociopsychological, cultural and historical

49 Karen Lury, 'A response to John Corner', *Screen*, vol. 48, no. 3 (2007), p. 373.

50 Raymond Williams, 'Drama in a dramatized society', reprinted in Alan O' Connor (ed.), *Raymond Williams on Television* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1989).

51 See Matt Hills, 'Media academics as media audiences: aesthetic judgements in media and cultural studies', in Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss and C. Lee Harrington (eds), *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2007), pp. 33–47.

phenomena, at least in the first instance, than by developing an expressive lexicon. Indeed, I am indebted to Karen Lury's exploration of Massumi's concept of 'topology' as a way for criticism to insist 'upon the engagement between the autobiography of the viewer (which is their history, their knowledge, their place) with the various and specific spatial qualities and duration of the programme'.⁴⁹ Duration, she notes, is particularly key here to what Massumi describes as 'intensity', a quality of viewer engagement over time that is not readily explained by textual emotional cues, not least because it is unpredictable and so much more self-reflexive, and presumably arises out of a greater investment of self. To revisit Smith briefly, we should nevertheless recall that the 'self' (and its history) is, in this context, one that is composed of imaginative emotional engagement with fiction, rather than a self that is necessarily constrained by recognizable social categories such as gender.

Human subjects may be infinitely more complex than models, but taxonomies of diversity do not themselves make sense of phenomena, even if they do document them. It strikes me that some of the most interesting questions raised by the presence of 'drama in a dramatized society' (to borrow Raymond Williams's phrase)⁵⁰ are often neglected because the methodological ground that would support them is slippery and because academic television criticism seems to have lost confidence in its own judgement (and indeed, in its own right to make judgements), particularly when it needs to entertain the range of emotions that may be experienced during viewing.⁵¹ Contemplating the significance of an enduring television character to our 'residual' culture requires a degree of assumption about textual affect, but theorizing the process of affect need not imply it is a simple and mechanical process. Perhaps, after all, it is up to the critic to imagine and articulate the dimensions of complex emotions, including possibilities not experienced by her/himself, so that scholars of audiences might have new questions to ask and prevailing wisdoms to challenge.

Abé Mark Nornes, *Cinema Babel: Translating Global Cinema*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008, 304 pp.

SHOHINI CHAUDHURI

Cinema Babel's biblical title evokes the myth of the universality of silent cinema as an international film language based on the visual rather than the linguistic, shattered by the sound era's proliferation of languages. Once believed to herald the demise of international cinema, the advent of sound gave rise to multilanguage versions (MLVs), subtitling and dubbing. In the present digital era, with its capacity to store multiple audio and subtitle tracks, DVD promises to resurrect the dream of a borderless cinema. In his book, however, Abé Mark Nornes starts from the premiss that translation has always been the condition of global screen traffic. Barriers of language stand between films and their international audiences, and translation allows films to cross borders. As audiences, critics, teachers and students of cinema we are often dependent on the mediation of subtitles, yet the translator's labour is typically disavowed, safeguarding the illusion of 'unmediated access' (p. 32). It is usually only when audiences become aware of peculiar errors of translation that they consider the phenomenon at all, and even then the concern tends to be with 'fidelity' to the 'original', revealing anxieties over misreading and distortion but rarely an understanding of translation as an interpretive practice.

Cinema Babel purports to be the first film studies book to engage with translation, an area that Nornes believes the discipline has largely ignored. Even a book such as *Subtitles*, he claims, does not deal with translation itself but rather with the concept of 'foreignness'.¹ He gestures to a growing body of literature on issues of *cultural* translation, including Hamid Naficy's *An Accented Cinema*, yet here too translation mostly occupies the place of a metaphor.² In contrast, Nornes considers an array of material practices of translation from the age of silent cinema to the present. Drawing on his expertise as a Japanese film scholar and translator, he uses largely, though not exclusively, Japanese examples, and the methodologies of archival research, industry history, textual analysis and translation studies, especially the work of Lawrence Venuti.³ The first half of the book is devoted to deconstructing the discourse of silent cinema's extralinguistic universality, revealing its dependence on 'armies of translators' (p. 108). Silent films were mediated by written and performed texts, including live narrators who assumed the role of master interpreters (such as the celebrated *benshi* in Japan), and intertitles, subjecting what was depicted onscreen to cultural domestication and censorship.

One of Nornes's contentions is that Hollywood achieved its domination of the international film market through its ability to employ large numbers of translators to prepare intertitles in many different languages. Film studies has long acknowledged that language gives film

1 Atom Egoyan and Ian Balfour (eds), *Subtitles: on the Foreignness of Film* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).

2 Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

3 Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: a History of Translation* (London: Routledge, 1995), and *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference* (London: Routledge, 1998).

- 4 Venuti writes: 'Since World War II, English has remained the most translated language worldwide, but one of the least translated into'. Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation*, p. 88.

industries a competitive advantage; however, this account gives a new emphasis to translation as a tool of domination and a regulator of film traffic. In global film distribution, 'language has always been a bottleneck', and translators play an unacknowledged but essential role in enabling the flows (p. 64). This would seem to echo Venuti's stance on the global hegemony of English and asymmetric patterns of translation in the post-1945 era.⁴

Much of *Cinema Babel*, therefore, is a tribute to the translators who are the unsung heroines and heroes of global cinema. A chapter entitled 'Interpreters with Attitude' vividly illustrates how the translator's work is paradoxically both invisible and subject to intense scrutiny, as in the uproar created when, onstage at the 1997 Venice Film Festival, Roberta Novelli deliberately mistranslated Takeshi Kitano's politically incorrect joke evoking the World War II alliance between Japan and Italy, in order to save the director from embarrassment during his acceptance speech for the Golden Lion award for *Hanabi/Fireworks* (1997) (p. 63). Nornes, furthermore, emphasizes the role of the translator as an 'intercultural mediator' (p. 34), citing the crucial role played by Helen Scott, interpreter for Truffaut's interviews with Hitchcock, without whom the pair's famous conversations would not have taken place. In these and other instances, the interpreter is not merely a 'conduit' facilitating the exchange of messages but an active participant in the construction of meaning (p. 60). It also illuminates the power of translators as gatekeepers, as shown in the example of Tony Rayns, who has used his influence as a critic, festival consultant and subtitler to promote East Asian cinema in the international film festival network.

One aspect of world cinema translation that is a staple of both academic and popular discussions is the subbing/dubbing debate. *Cinema Babel* unravels the customary oppositions, placing subtitling and dubbing in the context of a range of translation options which all enact a kind of violence and domestication of the source text. The adoption of one practice over another in a given territory is often governed by considerations of cost and size of the market, while cultural conditioning is what makes us prefer one type to another. Although there are other books that deal with the techniques of subtitling and dubbing, what is illuminating here is the consideration given to translators' working conditions, including the so-called 'Genesis file' of the DVD era, a 'neo-imperial project' in which English has been established as the 'source' language from which all translations are generated, so that subtitles for non-English-language films are 'actually translations of translations' (p. 235).

Nornes usefully divides the strategies of film translation into three categories – functional translation, corrupt translation and abusive translation – each of which has been dominant in a particular historical epoch but also exists simultaneously with the others. For example, far fewer subtitles (about a half or one third of today's average) were regarded as necessary in the prewar years in Japan (p. 167). Even when

5 Ibid., p. 95.

the primary goal of conveying the plot reduces the dialogue to this minimal function, the translation creates an inflected reading of the film based on what has been retained or excluded. Indeed, a key insight of translation studies is that in any translation, linguistic and cultural characteristics of the source text are lost while other characteristics belonging to the target culture are added to the mix; this is what Venuti has called 'the remainder', which releases an excess of different meanings.⁵

'Corrupt' subtitling, for instance, erases difference and assimilates the foreign into the target culture's dominant values in its attempt to enable the translated text to pass for the original. This translation strategy colludes with censorship: the 'cuts' made by translators on areas ranging from political content to obscene language. Abusive translation, meanwhile, saturates the text with the 'remainder' and does not seek to repress it. An abusive translation is one that eschews plot-driven equivalences and the illusion of unhindered access to 'the original'. It makes selections that swerve from standard linguistic forms, subverting norms and hierarchies or refusing to translate certain segments. Lest the reader charge him with an elitist strategy reminiscent of Brechtian distanciation, Nornes emphasizes that abusive translation is not incompatible with popular approaches; one source of inspiration is anime fandom, which has 'produced abusive subtitles *quite by instinct*' (p. 182). While the corrupt subtitler seeks to conceal his or her tampering with the text, the abusive subtitler seeks to highlight it – 'fucking it up with love and respect', to quote the words of one anime translator – which Nornes regards as an ethical response to the translator's dilemma, given that translation always entails a loss.

Wittily written, *Cinema Babel* is an insightful and fascinating book. It is tempting to compare it with *Babel* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2006), a film that reflects on translation issues in the current phase of cinematic globalization, testifying to the timeliness of these concerns. Although not mentioned in the book, it too forces us to consider cinema as a 'translation machine, making peoples from distant lands transparently comprehensible', whilst also submitting viewers to complex text–sign relationships and other abusive translation tactics, thus fostering critical awareness of semiotic heterogeneity (p. 21). However, Nornes's book has also left me wondering whether some aspects of the argument might have been significantly altered by consideration of other world cinema practices, such as the translation of films from other Indian languages into Hindi and use of playback singers in Indian cinema. The latter holds interesting implications for Nornes's characterization of dubbing as an uncanny ventriloquist's art, since the unstable relationships between actors and their voices break rules of verisimilitude. Nornes is rather dismissive of 1970s suture theory, expressing a preference for more historicized formulations, yet his own discussion of the ideology of the 'apparatus' of translation is partly indebted to it. Moreover, as his book to some extent acknowledges, the

‘foreignness’ of a film lies not only its language but also in its other material components: voice, objects, settings, physiognomies, gestures, costume, performance and the audiovisual representation of space and time. It would seem, therefore, that the broader notion of cultural translation is impossible to set aside.

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Paul Grainge, *Brand Hollywood: Selling Entertainment in a Global Media Age*. New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2008, 212 pp.

CATHERINE JOHNSON

While branding can be traced back to the ancient Greeks and has been widely used as a marketing strategy across the twentieth century, it appears to have taken a particularly central and significant role within western societies in the past twenty-five years. It has become a key cultural force for contemporary society, whether in the branding of political parties, the ubiquity of consumer brands such as Nike and Coca-Cola, the increasing protection given to brands through changes to trademark law, or the monetary value attributed to brands within the financial markets. It is hardly surprising, then, that we have seen the publication of a number of cultural and sociological studies of branding. Routledge is at the forefront of this scholarship with an impressive list of books examining the emergence and sociocultural function of branding.¹ Paul Grainge’s *Brand Hollywood* is the most recent addition to the list, and is the first major study to examine branding in relation to the specific characteristics of the US film (and television) industry.

Grainge acknowledges that branding has been apparent in the US film industry from the first decade of the twentieth century. However, central to *Brand Hollywood* is the assertion that by the 1990s ‘branding became an organizing principle – what some would call an orthodoxy – within the (new) media economy of Hollywood’ (p. 15). Grainge uses branding as a means to examine the changes within the US film industry during the 1990s, yet also tackles many of the wider arguments associated with the emergence of branding within contemporary capitalism. To this end, *Brand Hollywood* usefully lays out the parameters of the critical debates around contemporary branding. The association of the growing importance of branding at the end of the twentieth century with a neoliberal agenda to replace society with the marketplace has resulted in debates around whether brands are part of an increased commercialism that threatens democracy and citizenship or a site for contemporary struggles for meaning and identity. Tied to this is a historicization in which branding is seen to emerge in the shift from Fordist to post-Fordist means of production, or, in relation to Hollywood, in the growing role of

¹ Celia Lury, *Brands: the Logos of the Global Economy* (London: Routledge, 2004); Adam Arvidsson, *Brands: Meaning and Value in Media Culture* (London: Routledge, 2005); Jonathan E. Schroeder and Miriam Salzer-Mörling (eds), *Brand Culture* (London: Routledge, 2005).

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global multinational entertainment corporations in contemporary life. Grainge is keen to avoid simply viewing branding as part of a larger loss of citizenship amidst the commodification and commercialization of everyday life. He offers an engaging and convincing critique of the over-generalizations upon which many of the attacks on branding are founded, demonstrating that such arguments are based on arbitrary oppositions between art and commerce, citizens and consumers, that have long been challenged by film studies. Grainge's aim is to use a study of the emergence of branding to understand how Hollywood has attempted to adjust to changes in the entertainment environment during the 1980s and 1990s, and in doing so to map the detail and complexities of 'the contingencies of branding as a discursive and material practice' (p. 7).

Yet *Brand Hollywood* does not altogether eschew issues of power. Central to the book is the argument that branding is not simply a means by which power is wielded, but rather that 'brand signification remains a source for the construction and contestation of meaning' (p. 12). However, *Brand Hollywood* is more concerned with mapping the contingencies and contestations within the various ways in which the industry uses branding than with offering an analysis of the reception and consumption of brands by audiences/consumers. Indeed, *Brand Hollywood* argues that branding emerges as a central strategy in Hollywood in response to a period of economic uncertainty and rapid change. The new economy that emerged in Hollywood over the 1980s was characterized by increased conglomeratization, fragmentation of the audience, and fears about the instability of media markets. Within this context, Grainge demonstrates the centrality to Hollywood of 'total entertainment', a term that 'refers to industrial structures of corporate ownership as well as to particular textual and consumption practices that have developed at a junction where entertainment content is inclined, and designed, to travel in mobile ways across media platforms and ancillary/territorial markets' (p. 175). Branding enables the fluid commodification of films across media platforms, markets and products by managing the relationship between the various transmedia texts of contemporary cinema. At the same time, branding is particularly focused on managing the relationship between product/producer and consumer, attempting to encourage close identification between consumer and product. To this end, Grainge argues that 'the process of selling entertainment has come to rely, increasingly, on the principle of deepening audience involvement in immersive world brands' (p. 175). As such, branding operates to manage the spectator's movement across and within the extended fictional worlds of total entertainment.

Grainge's focus on total entertainment, such as *The Matrix* films (Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999, 2003), does raise the question of whether branding is equally relevant to the study of other forms of filmed entertainment and other aspects of Hollywood film production. Yet the scope of Grainge's study convincingly demonstrates the penetration of branding across a wide range of different aspects of Hollywood. It is here

that *Brand Hollywood* really demonstrates the value of using branding as a way of exploring the changes in Hollywood over the past twenty-five years, as it allows Grainge to examine varied aspects of Hollywood's industrial activities: the move of the Hollywood studios into television networks in the 1990s; the intersection of advertising, stardom and film production; the role of the library as a key asset in the DVD age; the emergence of the studio merchandise store as an immersive experience; the selling of technology (in a fascinating case study of the Dolby logo); the transformation of exhibition. Meanwhile, Warner Bros features as a recurring case within each chapter. This allows *Brand Hollywood* to examine the range of ways in which one studio uses branding and to compare the different relations of power evident in each case. Thus, in a chapter on the Warner Bros Looney Tunes films *Space Jam* (Joe Pytko, 1996) and *Back in Action* (Joe Dante, 2003), Grainge argues against understanding such films as simply 'rooted in the culture of neo-liberalism' (p. 128), demonstrating that although they function as entertainment vehicles for the sale of a range of commodity brands, this is narratively legitimized 'through forms of corporate irony that leave them knowing but "open" in an ideological and commercial sense' (p. 128). Meanwhile, in a chapter on the development of Warner megaplexes in Nottingham and Portsmouth, Grainge argues that while each case can be seen as an 'expression of Hollywood's organization of social space' (p. 171), this functions within the specificities of local contexts in which promotional branding campaigns had to be readjusted to respond to the actual audience uses of each cinema complex.

However, the challenge of writing about Hollywood and branding in this period also lies in managing the boundaries of such a study at a time when Hollywood intersects with a range of different industrial and cultural sectors. This is particularly apparent in Chapter 3, in which Grainge traces the development of the WB studio logo from the 1920s to the 2000s, arguing that corporate logos have become more tactile over the 1980s and 1990s, but is unable to account for the variations of the logo that were designed for television, animation, music and home entertainment (p. 184, fn. 4). This raises both the value and the problem of studying branding. On the one hand, it enables and demands analysis across aspects of the media industry (such as production, textuality, advertising and technology) often kept separate by disciplinary boundaries. On the other hand, it is not possible to maintain Grainge's wonderful attention to the nuances of detail and still look fully across the range of activities that encompass contemporary Hollywood. As such, it is worth pointing out that despite its title, the focus of *Brand Hollywood* is largely on cinema. Yet through this focus *Brand Hollywood* demonstrates the value of maintaining a medium-specific approach to contemporary media, even in today's conglomeratized industrial context. While Grainge shows that a study of contemporary film culture must look beyond the cinema to account for the centrality of marketing, synergistic cross-promotions and transmedia extensions, *Brand Hollywood* also

points to ways in which cinema and film are still differentiated by the industry – textually, discursively and experientially – in, for example, the appeal to the cinematic experience in the brand logos for Dolby. *Brand Hollywood* demonstrates, perhaps ironically, that detailed attention to the specificity of different industrial practices remains central in order to understand the place, role and function of branding in the converged and conglomeratized industries of contemporary Hollywood.

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Helen Wheatley (ed.), *Re-viewing Television History: Critical Issues in Television Historiography*. London and New York, NY: IB Tauris, 2007), 256 pp.

ELENI LIAROU

It seems that the ‘historical turn’ in television studies is complete and scholars are now firmly on the historical road. Since the start of the new millennium, academic publications, research projects, conferences and online resources on British television history have proliferated. Drama has been one of the first beneficiaries of this interest, but historical research into other genres, such as current affairs programmes, and comparative approaches within the European context have recently borne fruit with important publications.¹ The result is a growing body of histories that take a holistic approach, looking at television as a ‘whole way of life’: its aesthetic forms and texts, as well as institutions, policies and viewers.

The collection of articles in *Re-viewing Television History* not only exemplifies this trend but also marks a new, second ‘historical turn’ in the field of television history. I want to argue that the new element this time is an intensified interest in television history at the level of both analysis and methodology. More specifically, it is the systematic interrogation of methods and theories, borrowed from history as an academic discipline, which characterizes this new television research. In other words, history in television studies is now as much the object of analytic attention as it is a method of analysis. Helen Wheatley’s introduction to this book is one of the first concerted efforts to open up the dialogue between historians and television historians, and this is further explored in the essays which follow it.² The introduction contains many references to key texts in history studies, including Edward Hallett Carr’s *What is History?* (1961), Geoffrey R. Elton’s *The Practice of History* (1967), Keith Jenkins’s *Re-Thinking History* (1991) and Richard J. Evans’s *In Defence of History* (1998), in an attempt to engage with the fundamental questions of how and why we do television history.³ But what can television history gain from this approach?

- 1 Patricia Holland, *The Angry Buzz: This Week and Current Affairs Television* (London: IB Tauris, 2006); Peter Goddard, John Corner and Kay Richardson, *Public Issue Television: World in Action, 1963–98* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); Jonathan Bignell and Andreas Fickers (eds), *A European Television History* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008). An earlier, path-breaking contribution to the field of television and cultural history is John Corner (ed.), *Popular Television in Britain: Studies in Cultural History* (London: British Film Institute, 1991).
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One of the benefits is that we learn more about television history, its culture, people, practices and programmes. This is not a merely quantitative matter but one that touches on the thorny issue of selectivity: which programmes should we include in or exclude from our research? The question of selecting archival material and deciding what is worthy of historical interest and analysis is one that has long preoccupied historians. It is closely related to issues of objectivity and subjectivity in historiography and, in the end, to the kind of historical 'truths' we leave to later generations. The first section of *Re-viewing Television History*, 'Debating the Canon', engages with such questions. John Ellis warns us that in television research the process of selection is further complicated by the intrinsic qualities of the medium: it is intensely time-tied and consists of diverse and disparate material; it is 'endless and everyday' (p. 18). His list of questions that television historians may need to ask does not just 'create a clear means of discriminating between the vast swathes of material that exist' but, more importantly, helps us to reexamine the ways in which 'the idea of the canon concentrates on specific texts (rather than structures or history)' (p. 25). Looking at television drama, Jonathan Bignell broadens this debate and talks of 'a research canon and teachable canon' (p. 33), pointing to problems of accessibility and survival of audiovisual material as well as to the intricacies of constructing a (historiographic) canon for different audiences (students, academic researchers, non-specialist readers). This is a useful reminder of the widespread cultural and social visibility of television that challenges conventional definitions of the 'sacred archive' available only to historians.

Alternative, decentralized and more inclusive television histories are another major contribution offered by historically informed studies. Emma Sandon's sophisticated employment of oral history methodologies to reevaluate the early history of BBC Television sheds valuable light not only on the collective spirit but also on the class and gender divisions that characterized the workforce at the BBC's Alexandra Palace studios between 1936 and 1952. Her 'life history' approach, influenced by historians such as Alistair Thomson, Robert Perks and Luisa Passerini, is sensitive to the ways in which oral accounts are mediated by nostalgia, pride, regret, even trauma. This approach reveals the complexity with which past and present are implicated in establishing or questioning certain views on the early history of public service broadcasting and television entertainment.

Lez Cooke's and Jamie Medhurst's essays are examples of an increasing interest in regional and national television history. Cooke's study of the *Second City Firsts* anthology series, produced by the BBC's English Regions Drama in Birmingham, and Medhurst's work on the Welsh independent television company Teledu Cymru decentralize television history, echoing similar achievements in the field of microhistory and local history studies. Using a wide range of sources and methods (interviews, production research, personal diaries, newspaper

accounts), these two essays uncover overlooked or lost histories and highlight the richness and diversity of British television culture, its people and policies.

A panoramic and comparative look at what television history can gain from history as an academic discipline, and how this can be achieved, brings crucial issues in this debate into sharper focus. British film history, for example, has undoubtedly benefited not just from historical methodologies but also from the work of political, social and economic historians such as Nicholas Pronay, Jeffrey Richards and, more recently, John Sedgwick. This list is in no way comprehensive or even representative, but few would disagree that historians' research into film has advanced our understanding of the role of British cinema within broader histories of society and culture.

The question emerging here is whether we can say the same for historians in respect of television research. Erin Bell and Ann Gray's study of history programmes on television represents the expansion and sophistication of public history methods. Without denying the social and political significance of such projects, it is interesting that historians appear to prefer to do television research *in relation* to history; those who engage with television *in its own right* are comparatively rare.⁴ In 2001, Graham Roberts wrote that the reasons for this were 'similar to those that led to the reluctance to engage in film: methodological difficulties, academic snobbery, the fear of the new and/or transient'.⁵ Peter Caterall's work on Channel 4, based on witness seminars, is a welcome exception, but more certainly needs to be done if historians wish to produce work that is socially, culturally and politically relevant.⁶

Re-viewing Television History is an eclectic volume that manages to bridge some of the gaps between academic disciplines. Its breadth of subjects and methods is remarkable (ranging from issues of value and quality in television historiography to methods of reaching and reading the historical audience in terms of age, class, gender and race) and can be an inspiring guide for researchers, teachers, students and media enthusiasts. As its editor acknowledges, some of the gains of this multidimensional approach may, however, be impeded by the book's strict division into Textual Histories, Production and Institutions, and Audiences, which betrays a certain anxiety about how to do television history by safely resorting to familiar categorizations. A more dynamic approach may now be needed, one that encourages analysis and method as much as synthesis, with a focus on themes that could enhance this recent holistic approach to television research by placing it at the centre of histories about society and culture.

doi:10.1093/screen/hjp006

4 Asa Briggs's seminal five-volume work on the history of the BBC, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom* (1961–95), is an early and very influential contribution to this field.

5 Graham Roberts, 'The historian and television – methodological survey', in Graham Roberts and Philip Taylor (eds), *The Historian, Television and Television History* (Luton: University of Luton Press, 2001), p. 2.

6 Peter Caterall (ed.), *The Making of Channel 4* (London: Frank Cass, 1999). See also Lawrence Black, 'Whose finger on the button? British television and the politics of cultural control', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol. 25, no. 4 (2005), pp. 547–75.

Lawrence A. Rickels, *Ulrike Ottinger: the Autobiography of Art Cinema*. Minneapolis, MN and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008, 207 pp.

ANGELA McROBBIE

The work of Ulrike Ottinger has, in the pages of *Screen* and many other scholarly books and journals, provoked a good deal of controversy as well as critical acclaim among film theorists. Ottinger has been making films – among them *Madame X: eine absolute Herrscherin/Madame X: an Absolute Ruler* (1978), *Bildnis einer Trinkerin/Ticket of No Return* (1979), *Freak Orlando* (1981), *China: die Künste, der Alltag/China: the Arts, Everyday Life* (1986), *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia* (1989), *Südostpassage/Southeast Passage* (2002) and *Prater* (2007) – at a prolific rate since the late 1970s, despite the funding difficulties that invariably accompany such an uncompromising vision and style. Her whole body of work (feature film, ethnographic documentary, photography, sculpture and video art installation) has in recent years in Germany and many other European countries, at last received the recognition it deserves, culminating in the screening of *Southeast Passage* at Documenta in Kassel in 2002 and in the highly successful retrospective of her work in Berlin in 2007. Nevertheless, in the UK film world there has been, in the last fifteen years, a relentless disparaging of the seriousness, tenacity and ‘high-mindedness’ with which a filmmaker like Ottinger pursues her erudite obsessions. For this reason, with the exception of an academic and arthouse audience, her later films have failed to find the acclaim in the UK that might otherwise be expected. Yet Ottinger’s cinema has always held a key position in film theory, culminating in the great attention paid to her work in the 1980s and 1990s by feminist film scholars. Ottinger’s work has helped to shape feminist film theory from its earliest days, in essays by Annette Kuhn, Miriam Hansen, Teresa De Lauretis, Kaja Silverman, Gertrud Koch, Janet Bergstrom, Sabine Hake, Brenda Longfellow, Mandy Merck and Patricia White. As Ottinger herself often remarks, her work gives rise to hostile reactions. In the early years this often came from feminists themselves, who found her attitude to sex and power too cruel or too coldly unsentimental, her defiant antirealism too intellectual, her provocative lesbian desires – fixed unrelentingly on the fashionable and beautiful bodies of some of her best-known actors (Tabea Blumenschein, Delphine Seyrig, the model Verushka) – too disconcertingly amorous, too bold, adventurous and unapologetic. While her work is now retrospectively credited with being at the forefront of queer cinema, this too has not been without controversy. Writing in *Screen*, Kristen Whissel has argued forcefully that the lesbian desires and fantasies enacted in films like *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia* are predicated on an orientalist exoticization of other women, and that Ottinger uncritically replicates an eroticized imperialist gaze in the encounters with Mongolian people.¹

1 Kristen Whissel, ‘Racialized spectacle, exchange relations, and the Western in *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*’, *Screen*, vol. 37, no. 1 (1996), pp. 41–67.

Lawrence A. Rickels's book is to be welcomed in that it considers Ottinger's work in its entirety and refuses to make simplistic distinctions between her early films, her move into a more anthropological oeuvre (culminating in the works which have focused directly or indirectly on China, its cosmopolitan past and its postcommunist present), and the transition from the cinema to the art gallery as the site for reception. Rickels's engagement with Ottinger marks a break with existing writing on her work, and indeed with the established writing styles of film theory, in a number of ways. He interweaves analysis of the film texts with an account of his own role in her life: as witness to the filmmaking process; as one who has had the opportunity to talk with her on many occasions; and as an art critic commenting on those parts of her work which inhabit the gallery world. Indeed questions of authorial reflexivity and of how to write about work like this from a position which is almost inside the work itself are foremost in Rickels's project. He is wary of the journalistic voice and goes to great lengths to dissociate himself from this, even though few would interpret his writing on Ottinger in this way. He clearly comprehends the importance of serious journalism to the public success of films and artwork such as Ottinger's. Ticket sales and extensive cinema distribution are naturally dependent on the opinion of critics, and Ottinger has shown herself to be a lucid, vociferous and engaging subject in interview. Nevertheless, Rickels fears the simplifications of journalism, while labouring to invent a style that takes into account his proximity to the artist and her world. He becomes something of an ethnographer himself: hanging about on set, observing how Ottinger works; including in the book several of his interviews with her; listening closely to what she says about her work, about its production and its reception; in effect responding to the work by extrapolating its thematics. Frequently this entails some lengthy digressions, usually on psychoanalytic topics or on areas in which Rickels himself has expertise, in particular allegory, the iconography of the devil and the history of European literature. But Rickels's greatest influence is Walter Benjamin. It is the writing of Benjamin, the jarring, collage effect of his word-images, statements and quotations, which provides some kind of framework for Rickels. This is not just a question of style. Rickels shares with Benjamin a political aesthetics which requires the use of certain shock tactics in writing, and which is concerned with memory, temporality, history, and the importance of breaking through or cutting into the clichés of required or standardized responses to art and culture. Although Benjamin's influence is sometimes a little overt, combined as it is with his presence in the environment of the work being created (itself a Benjaminian stance), it pushes Rickels to develop his distinctive argument across the different forms and media which Ottinger utilizes.

The question, then, is how Rickels understands this body of work dating back to the late 1970s. He offers no quick summary of his argument, which in many ways is buried quite deep in the text and is implicit rather than explicit. I would say that he brings Ottinger into the

heart of a tradition of work which is closely related to the writings of both Adorno and Benjamin, as well as to the art of surrealism, expressionism and the European avant garde. But the key connection with Benjamin lies in Ottinger's immersion in allegory. Formally Rickels sees her work as functioning by means of a collage effect, or through the invention of a distinct image language akin to that which Benjamin strove to develop. And Ottinger's rich interweaving of memory flashes, of fantasy and dream material; her fascination with objects (especially photographs) which have faded or are seemingly neglected or half-forgotten and which somehow belong to another epoch; her observations about everyday life made strange or slightly twisted; her most recent film about the history of the Prater park in Vienna, a precursor of Disney theme parks, a place of urban amusements, of thrills and ghost rides; all of these fit so closely with Benjamin's writing in *Berlin Childhood* and *One Way Street* that the connection, once Rickels has made it, seems self evident. But the connection goes further: Ottinger reworks the *flâneur* theme and gives it a lesbian-feminist twist in her astonishingly prescient work *Ticket of No Return* (described, Rickels reminds us, by the film critic Jonathan Rosenbaum as 'one of the few true masterpieces of the contemporary German avant-garde cinema'). Like Benjamin, Ottinger also has a fascination with femininity, fashion and with the kind of beautiful, anonymous woman who can drink her way through the city streets, immersing herself in its bars, cafes, gay milieu and lowlife. The Benjamin connection is also vivid in Ottinger's obsession with allegory, with baroque, gothic and aesthetic forms which are never transparent but instead somehow half-buried, almost dead. Rickels reminds us of her collector's eye, her fascination with other people's collections of bric-a-brac, mementoes, objects which have a life of their own, which function as collective memory.

The connection is again apparent in what Rickels argues is the underpinning of Ottinger's art, which is the centrality of exile; including, one might add, exile from a normative heterosexualized subjectivity. Far from espousing an unthinking orientalist vision in her travels, Ottinger examines the traces of people's movements, forced or otherwise. *Exile Shanghai* documents the Jewish community in that city, those who fled Nazi Germany to make lives for themselves there. In *Southeast Passage* she traces back the journeys of those who more recently moved from east to west Europe, visiting Odessa (and its steps) and other overlooked places. Ottinger refutes the criticism of her work as orientalist by insisting on her interest in nomadic peoples, from wandering Jews to the tribes of Mongolia. In my view, Ottinger is interested in what Mary Louise Pratt has famously called 'contact zones',² colonized places of mingling and of encounters with others, typically used for the production of knowledge which will invariably be exploited by the colonialist powers. But, as Pratt argues, what actually happens in those contact zones is not always and entirely aggressive or exploitative. Ottinger brings a queer camera to other spaces; her aesthetic of travel and of

2 Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1992).

movement is not simply an imperialist eye,³ even though she parodies the eager tourists' search for novelty and excitement in *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*.

Ottinger will simply not play the good feminist, or indeed the good lesbian filmmaker; she stretches our progressive political sensibility to the limits; she fetishizes female beauty to the point of obsession; her cinematic desires are seemingly cruel and capricious (as in her witty SM masterpiece *Madame X*); she takes a slice of the other and renders it strange, interesting, but still marginal. For some she is simply too interested in 'peoples', old and young, beautiful and ugly, male, female and transgender, but all maybe seen, through her own distinctive vision, as 'collectibles'. There is criticism that she is not political enough, although one might say that in producing certain kinds of theory-informed ethnographic films she opens up debate about precisely these issues. Rickels points finally to Ottinger's constant referencing of media itself, to her own chosen media, to the history of cinema which leaves its traces across her own body of work. He shows Ottinger's work belongs both to the past and to the future. She memorializes classic cinema (Tabea is arguably her Garbo), drawing on that history as she endeavours to resolve questions about form and image in documentary practice.

Rickels has produced a marvellously rich account and analysis of Ottinger's work, contributing to our engagement with it by bringing into his text an oblique, or perhaps buried, use of the word autobiography. He argues that there is the (Benjaminian) sense in which Ottinger's aesthetic is one which gives her 'films' the chance to produce an autobiography of themselves as 'things' (it is this quality which has also encouraged art critics to see her work as a forerunner of Matthew Barney's). And as Rickels also points out, there is the similarly buried (or rather hidden away) autobiography of Ottinger herself. Half-Jewish, as a baby and young child in Nazi Germany she was hidden away from the Gestapo in an attic with her mother. Being in such close proximity to her mother, Ottinger revealed in later years, she came to share her desire for travel and escape; a desire also for cultural mix, cultural translation and a cosmopolitan ethics of otherness.

doi:10.1093/screen/hjp007

Andy Medhurst, *A National Joke: Popular Comedy and English Cultural Identities*. New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2007, 228 pp.

BRETT MILLS

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humour which the academy often finds politically problematic. Yet Medhurst, aware of the joke's troubling nature, nevertheless admits that he laughed when he first heard it. Indeed, he goes on to analyze the joke in much detail, suggesting that, in its structure and efficiency, it is an impressive piece of humour whose efficacy is something to be admired. Yet this does not negate the joke's problematic content; it is, therefore, 'one of the best and worst jokes I have ever heard' (p. 21). This moment is telling because it demonstrates Medhurst's willingness to acknowledge the complexity of humour, not only as an aesthetic form but also as a political entity. The po-faced attitude often taken towards comedy by the academy, in which the pleasures it can offer are forever measured against progressive assumptions, is here found wanting. For Medhurst, the joy and astonishment that humour can bring is something to be relished and made sense of, not rejected as inappropriate merely because of the academy's dogma. That said, Medhurst does go on to acknowledge that, at a Roy 'Chubby' Brown gig, he responded less favourably to a similarly well-structured and efficient joke about Kenny Everett's HIV-related illness, precisely because, as a gay man, he 'felt expelled from belonging' (p. 25) from the audience roaring with laughter. These two incidents highlight the contextual nature of comedy and the ways in which analysis of humour must tread a difficult line between ideological criticism and aesthetic appreciation.

These examples show that, as a writer, Medhurst places his own responses and particularities at the heart of the analysis within this book. This is emphatically not detached, objective writing which aims to make sense of comedy in a manner which would 'explain' it. Instead, Medhurst's approach is one interested in the 'flavour and feel' (p. 2) of comedy, and he quickly acknowledges that such seemingly woolly terms might scare off readers seeking more sober and critical analysis. Indeed, his approach might suggest this book is nothing more than Medhurst's personal reflections on the comedy he likes, throwing its validity as an academic text into question. Yet I would suggest that it is just such an approach that the analysis of comedy (and perhaps all media and cultural forms) requires, precisely because responses to it are couched in the personal and the momentary. In attempting to capture the ways in which comedy functions socially and personally, rather than merely as a reflection of cultural norms and values, Medhurst offers a useful methodological shift which accepts a range of contradictory responses to material as equally 'appropriate'. Acknowledging that he found the racist and sexist 'seaside incident' uproariously funny, Medhurst offers himself up for attack by those who see the content of such humour as straightforwardly problematic; it would be best, however, to see such an admission as a vital step in moving towards a more nuanced analysis of the complexities of humour. As Medhurst goes on to note, the academy has often focused on reasons *not* to find things funny rather than the reasons why people *do*, which means that it has often been involved in a process of 'downgrading any consideration of the happiness of the many'

(p. 202). For a field supposedly interested in the social and cultural functions of media forms, this can be seen as a damning criticism.

In common with many other books on humour, Medhurst spends his introduction outlining why the consideration of humour might be a worthwhile task. While it is telling that the analysis of humour remains a field in which such a defensive tone must be adopted from the outset, this book offers a sustained justification for future scholars working in the field. This reticence to examine comedy is perhaps exacerbated by Medhurst's placing of his subject in the context of Englishness. In drawing on the work of Benedict Anderson and Michael Billig,¹ Medhurst argues that English comedy 'contributes significantly to how English culture has imagined its Englishness' (p. 1). He argues for comedy to be understood at a national level, though acknowledges the difficulties this causes in a country where there is an ongoing debate about devolution. In offering analyses of a wide range of performers, writers and texts – such as Alan Bennett, Victoria Wood, the *Carry On* films, Frank Randle and *The Royle Family* – he outlines a convincing argument for the specificity of English humour. Indeed, he makes a convincing case for comedy as central to analyses of the ways in which English national identity is 'imagined', just as Jeffrey Richards has argued that comedy functioned as a 'secret weapon' during the war, as the national sense of humour became representative of the ideals being defended from 'humourless' Germans.²

Yet there are spaces and omissions in this book which would have deepened the analysis. Performers and writers such as Steve Coogan or Armando Iannucci and programmes including *Absolutely Fabulous* are summarily dismissed as 'over-hyped and merely modish' (p. 6), which might surprise those for whom these are significant cultural texts of the last decade. Of course the personal approach Medhurst takes towards his material inevitably results in a selective process. Yet it might have been interesting for his book to examine why texts such as these might be read differently by others, and to consider the multiple responses comedy can engender. Indeed, noticeably missing from much of the analysis of comedy is an examination of failure or displeasure – surely as significant and meaningful a response to humour as joy and appreciation.

Interrogating why Medhurst dismisses these performers and programmes would be a useful way into contemplating the fissures and contradictions in humour within the national context – something which is at the core of this book. In my experience, many viewers in the USA and Australia see *Absolutely Fabulous* as quintessentially English, and during the 1990s it was one of the key programmes through which English humour was understood abroad, conforming to outsiders' expectations of English comedy even if some within Britain might reject such a reading. National comedy may be defined at local, national and international levels, with the latter significant for the global trading of comedy programmes and formats. Medhurst's work, on the whole, remains at the national level, and in this it rightly rejects the notion that

1 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983); Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995).

2 Jeffrey Richards, *Films and British National Identity: from Dickens to Dad's Army* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 87.

globalization is now so pervasive that understanding culture at this level is untenable. He acknowledges his own 'critical eye mired in parochialism' (p. 169), which is inevitably the way in which most people examine their own relationship to the nation. Yet such parochialism may, in a few instances, result in a glossing over of comedic texts which, in their popularity and success, perhaps require at least a little attention, if only for their inadequacies to be outlined in more detail.

However, this is not to deny the incisive persuasiveness of the arguments and readings on offer here, or the significance *A National Joke* has for debates about culture, representation, nationhood and identity. Because of the vagaries of the academic community, it is likely that this book will be understood as one relevant only to those with an interest in the analysis of comedy; if this is the case, it will merely reiterate how comedy is marginalized within academia, despite Medhurst's convincing demonstration of its centrality to national culture as a whole.

doi:10.1093/screen/hjp008

Kathryn H. Fuller-Seeley (ed.), *Hollywood in the Neighborhood: Historical Case Studies of Local Moviegoing*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2008, 276 pp.

Paul S. Moore, *Now Playing: Early Moviegoing and the Regulation of Fun*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008, 250 pp.

C. PAUL SELLORS

Histories of film exhibition and audiences have for a while now focused on major US urban centres, predominantly New York and Chicago, during the silent film era. Many of these studies grew out of a historiographical need. The reevaluation of silent cinema over the last thirty years has raised substantive questions requiring an understanding of exhibition practices and audiences. Given the presence of producers and distributors in cities like New York and Chicago, the extensive historical records and newspapers available in local city archives, attention to urban centres in the trade press, and the vast number of questions prompted by urban film exhibition – especially those film studies' stalwarts race, ethnicity, class and gender – film historians quite understandably have furnished detailed and diverse pictures of filmgoing in these metropolises. Despite the value of such historical research, it does give an incomplete picture of how cinema developed and functioned across the rest of the USA and in other parts of the world. Consequently, when considering general histories of film exhibition and spectatorship we need to be cognisant of the fact that our knowledge is partial, and conclusions reached about film exhibition in urban locations cannot, at least not without further research, be applied generally. To

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understand the bigger picture of the development of film exhibition and spectatorship, historians must examine a variety of locations throughout the history of the medium. Both books considered in this review provide significant contributions to this historical project.

In his essay in Kathryn H. Fuller-Seeley's *Hollywood in the Neighborhood*, Robert C. Allen notes that this bias towards urban centres is not just a problem for film history but is ingrained in wider historiographical practices. Adopting Timothy Gilfoyle's term 'Gothamcentric', Allen maintains that film history has been hampered by 'tendencies to place the metropolis at the center of historical narratives of moviegoing' and by the presumption that small-town and rural exhibition practices simply reproduced on a smaller scale those of major cities (p. 20). Gothamcentrism undermines the very need to study small-town and rural exhibition since it implies nothing new is to be gained from such an endeavour; yet it fails with the first sign of evidence. Allen argues that one of the reasons for the bias towards cities in film history is the belief that a substantial proportion of the population resided in the cities. Here Allen provides historians with an important reminder that evidence taken at face value can be deceptive. The definitions of 'rural' and 'urban' used by the Census Bureau differ from our current understandings and thus give historians a false impression of the extent of urban populations in early twentieth-century America. Major cities like New York, Chicago and Philadelphia housed just over nine per cent of the population, not the near one-third that the definitions of 'rural' and 'urban' used in the census may prompt historians to believe (p. 22). Allen's assertion in this essay that local histories are essential to flesh out a robust understanding of cinema is not new. Already in 1985 he and Douglas Gomery, in their book *Film History: Theory and Practice*, had asserted the need for studies of local film exhibition to better explain not just how film exhibition developed across various locations but also how film integrated into and affected social and economic systems.¹

In *Now Playing: Early Moviegoing and the Regulation of Fun*, Paul S. Moore provides an indepth analysis of film exhibition in Toronto between 1906 and the end of World War I, demonstrating how it integrated with local politics and social practices.² The extent of the research in this book is impressive. Moore draws on a wide array of newspapers, legislation, local archival material and established research to elaborate how in Toronto – a city that lacked a film production base – film exhibition developed between the pressures of local sensibilities and the nascent US film industry. The difficulty of such a project, though, is positioning the research within a fruitful and apposite historiographical framework. Herein lies one of the challenges of Gothamcentrism. Although Moore argues that local exhibition must be considered on its own terms, he often relies extensively on research and arguments about New York and Chicago. This is understandable to a degree; good research makes use of established discussions. Consequently, he pays close attention to issues such as fire safety, reform agendas, leisure,

1 Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice* (London: McGraw-Hill Publishing, 1985).

2 A quibble perhaps, but the title of this book is unfortunate. Given the US-centric practices in film history, a book about moviegoing in Toronto would benefit from the city's name placed prominently in the title. Maps illustrating the geography of the cinemas referred to in the argument would also have helped to orientate the reader.

censorship and citizenship. Moore does an admirable job elaborating the specific flavour these issues have north of the border. Nevertheless, his argument at times seems driven by a need to contextualize Toronto with New York and especially Chicago, but often with no clear methodological explanation to justify such comparisons. For instance, he does not explain the significance for Toronto film exhibition of the regulation of film shows in the Chicago suburbs or the presence of tie-ins between film serials and Chicago newspapers. He argues that Toronto's position as a commonwealth city with substantial immigration from the UK inflects it with a British sensibility. It would have been worth exploring this hybrid position more extensively.

Moore provides an important argument about evidence. Film historians rely extensively on local newspapers, but few elaborate the significance and limits of this form of research. Newspapers do more than simply report, he argues; they signal, implicitly and explicitly, local mores and map out the social and cultural life of a city. The combination of news, commentary and advertising fosters collective sociocultural engagement which can then be traced by historians.

Hollywood in the Neighborhood provides numerous case studies that demonstrate the detailed accounts of film exhibition and spectatorship that can be gleaned from newspapers and trade publications. Contributors to this book produce a variety of historical accounts explaining the spread of cinema into the 'hinterlands', from the early travelling show to the established theatres of the 1930s. If one theme resonates throughout these essays, it is that to succeed, local cinemas could not be simply local businesses but had to play a central role in the community. Examining Wilmington, NC, Anne Morely contends that film exhibitors' need to be considered as part of the local community began with the travelling exhibitions. Exhibitors had to gauge and cater for the sensibilities of the local clientele – a practice that persisted with the construction of permanent theatres. This does not imply, however, that small-town audiences embodied provincial attitudes. Audiences also required of their showmen that they exhibit the same films available to the major urban centres. These recurrent themes of the community as simultaneously a local collective and a part of the nation, and the local film exhibitor as member of the local community and part of a national industry, are evident in a number of the essays in this volume, notably those by George Potamianos, Terry Lindvall, Richard Abel and Leslie Midkiff DeBauche.

Fuller-Seeley demonstrates in her own essay that trade journals did more than report on the industry. In her study of 'What the Pictures Did for Me', published in the widely-circulated journal *Motion Picture Herald*, she discusses how small-town exhibitors used the column to provide feedback about the problems their businesses encountered, including the types of films that did and did not work well in their cinemas. Her study indicates another reason why it is important that film historians understand properly the audience serviced by urban and

regional theatres: the vast population catered for by small-town cinemas had economic clout. One must first grasp the significance of regional cinemas for the industry, as Fuller-Seeley does, before one can recognize that this column is not the bleatings of a few insignificant hicks.

Kevin Corbett takes this notion of the *vox populi* one step further, endorsing an ‘*ethnographic* analysis of film audiences’ (p. 233). He suggests that to learn about experiences of spectatorship and running cinemas we should ask the people who were involved. He notes that questionnaires and interviews are often discussed but rarely utilized in film historiography. He is right that ethnographic methods should be considered when appropriate. What is striking about his essay, though, is his near exclusive use of interviews. Corbett offers scant explanation of how he determined his sample, any bias inherent in his sampling method or questions, significant historical developments in film exhibition experienced across the wide age range of people he interviewed, or how accurate we should expect forty- or sixty-year-old recollections to be. Nostalgia, for instance, can be quite effective in tinting our perspective on the past. Consequently, the conclusions he reaches – for example that audiences support old local cinemas ‘because they appreciate the historical significance of the buildings themselves and/or because they enjoy the social and cultural benefits of going to theatres like these’ – are not, as he presents them, terribly convincing (p. 246). Corbett asks his readers to accept, without evidence, first that his sample is sufficiently representative and second that the excerpts he provides from the interviews accurately encapsulate the broader sentiments elaborated in the full versions. These interviews certainly are interesting and valuable, but require a more rigorous methodological frame and need to be validated against other forms of evidence, such as newspapers, trade journals, diaries and a host of other records generated by the film exhibition trade.

Research into local film exhibition aims to fill a substantial void in our Gothamcentric outlook. It is nevertheless worth considering the use-value of such histories. Studies of local exhibition frequently produce interesting accounts of local practices and values, but will find real worth when they can help to reveal and reevaluate the bigger picture.³ Studies in both volumes discussed here quite successfully enable reevaluation of the centrality of urban America to the story of film exhibition. However, the contributors to Fuller-Seeley’s book frequently resist examining the methodological tools used to sculpt their histories. We may ask, for instance, if the comparable conclusions in many of these essays are in any way determined by the general use of newspapers and trade journals? I do not want to suggest we should avoid these invaluable sources, only that we should be more attentive to the limits and biases of our evidence, and to how even the most commonly used sources affect the conclusions we can draw. Furthermore, *Hollywood in the Neighborhood* would benefit from an introduction that better contextualized the variety of histories in its pages. The book is composed of new and reprinted essays;

3 Carlo Ginzburg argues similarly that ‘micro-history’ is about generalizations, and not a ‘cult for fragments’. His comments can be heard in the *Open Source* podcast ‘The Hunter’s Evidence: Carlo Ginzburg’, <http://www.radioopensource.org/the-hunters-evidence-carlo-ginzburg/> [accessed 5 January 2009].

an explanation of the methodological and historiographical significance of the earlier works, and an evaluation of how the newer essays utilize or challenge their lessons, would have helped to exemplify the intricate and essential relationship between histories and historical methods.

doi:10.1093/screen/hjp009

Barbara J. Selznick, *Global Television: Co-Producing Culture* (Emerging Media: History, Theory, Narrative Series). Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2008, 210 pp.

ELKE WEISSMANN

Television Studies has in recent years seen a renewed interest in transnational and international television programming. This has been partially fuelled by the increased digitization which has allowed more television content to be available beyond national borders. At the same time, the apparent increase in availability has also sparked a historical interest that challenges notions of national hegemonies and highlights how fundamentally transnational most broadcasting is and has been.¹ Barbara Selznick's *Global Television: Co-Producing Culture* is a welcome addition to this scholarship, particularly as it focuses a whole monograph on one issue that often receives only marginal attention: international coproductions.

Selznick discusses coproductions of the late 1980s and 1990s that involved US money. Although her historical period is set quite tightly, the book's focus is nevertheless relatively broad as Selznick investigates action dramas, drama series which are marked as distinctly British despite their coproduction status, children's television and documentaries. Unlike much of the contemporary scholarship, Selznick uses only institutional and economic explanations as a background for an intensely cultural scrutiny of a range of television programmes, some of which have been much neglected. The focus on trying to understand the cultural implications of coproductions – what cultural values they contain, how they teach and conceptualize such important issues as citizenship, national identity and history – is an interesting and valuable one and usefully adds to work done by, for example, Jeffrey Miller.² Nevertheless, Selznick's book requires a more thoroughly considered approach to develop its full potential.

Selznick attempts to unravel what culturally distinguishes coproductions but does not offer a comparative analysis that would give further clout to her arguments. Chapter 1, for example, suggests that coproductions reject nationalism in favour of a stronger focus on building identity and historical memory upon family connections. Although her two sample programmes, *The Odyssey* (American

¹ Valerie Camporesi, *Mass Culture and the Defence of National Traditions: the BBC and American Broadcasting, 1922–1954* (Florence: European University Institute, 1990).

² Jeffrey S. Miller: *Something Completely Different: British Television and American Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

an explanation of the methodological and historiographical significance of the earlier works, and an evaluation of how the newer essays utilize or challenge their lessons, would have helped to exemplify the intricate and essential relationship between histories and historical methods.

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3 'Q&A with Alisdair Milne', *Radio Times*, 5-11 September 1981, pp. 79-81.

Zoetrope, Beta Film, Hallmark Entertainment, KirchMedia, Mediaset, Panfilm, Pro7 Media AG, Remote Camera Systems, Skai TV, 1997) and *Highlander, the Series* (Davis-Panzer Productions, Filmline International, Gaumont Télévision, 1992-98) provide ample evidence for this argument, it begs the question of how this is different from other, non-coproduced programming. Much drama produced in the western world has rejected nationalism as a structuring principle for both character identity and communal memory, which in the light of the atrocities of World War II is hardly surprising. This lack of comparative analysis is unfortunately compounded by missing historical detail. In Chapter 2, which discusses the 'British brand' and dramas coproduced between the BBC and A&E, Selznick focuses on ABC, one company involved in A&E, as a coproducer rather than investigating the long history of BBC connections to RCA, another company involved in A&E. The connections between the BBC and RCA came about when Time-Life, hitherto the BBC's main coproducer (collaborating on some of the BBC's biggest successes in the USA, including *The Ascent of Man* [1973] and *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* [1970]), lost interest in coproducing with the BBC in the late 1970s and early 1980s. RCA saw a chance to get access to relatively cheap but also relatively valuable material – the BBC's productions generally enjoyed critical success in the USA. RCA worked out a contract with the BBC which meant that RCA was able to access several hundred hours of BBC productions for a fixed price.³ RCA used this material on its new Entertainment Channel, out of which A&E would eventually evolve. As a consequence, A&E too developed a strong brand identity that was partially constructed around the importing of British television content.

Chapter 2 in particular suffers from a US focus that cannot do justice to some of the dramas discussed. *Cracker* (Granada, A&E, 1993-96, 2006), one of the two case studies of the chapter, is compared to dramas of the 1960s, including *The Prisoner* (Everyman Films, ITC, 1967-68) and *The Avengers* (ABC Weekend Television, 1961-69), dramas in Britain known as mid-Atlantic productions because the ITV companies that produced them also wanted to attract a US audience and developed a structure and style that was relatively close to US productions of that time. *Cracker*, however, follows more the tradition of realist drama in the vein of *Cathy Come Home* (BBC, 1966) than the adventure series of the 1960s and 1970s. *Cracker* was written by Jimmy McGovern, a writer who started his career on *Brookside* (Mersey Television, 1982-2003) and has since written and produced several other realist dramas. It is noticeable that his name is never mentioned in Selznick's book.

Instead, Selznick makes a case for the existence of two specific brands of Britishness in the USA – one which developed around period drama and the other which developed from the mod subculture that first surfaced in Britain in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Although these brands might exist in the USA, her analysis lacks detail in relation to publicity material that frames *Cracker* within this tradition there. How

- 4 Jeanette Steemers, *Selling Television: British Television in the Global Marketplace* (London: British Film Institute, 2004).

did prepublicity refer to the drama? How did trailers for the drama on A&E connect it more widely to other British-based productions when it was first shown on US television? And is there not perhaps a third tradition, and perhaps even brand, of social-realist drama that is recognized as British in the USA? As these questions remain unanswered, Selznick's analysis of *Cracker* as connected to In-Yer-Face Theatre and to the New Labour brand of Cool Britannia which connects back to the 1960s mod culture remains somewhat unconvincing. Unfortunately, Selznick also remains somewhat US-centred in her references. One of the best books published in recent years on questions of transnationalism in relation to British television is Jeanette Steemer's *Selling Television*, which is notably absent from Selznick's bibliography.⁴

Despite these flaws, Selznick's book provides interesting starting points for future debate. Her insistence on thinking through the cultural implications of transnational television can only be embraced, although these implications will have to be considered within a wider framework. The analysis of a range of coproductions partly financed by US money has produced some interesting thoughts and insights, particularly around children's programming, which she discusses and critiques in relation to ideas of citizenship. She argues that citizenship has become too focused on an economic model where recognition and citizen rights are based on purchasing power. Selznick here clearly intervenes in a tradition of cultural criticism that scrutinizes US hegemony in the trade of television content and the subsequent circulation of capitalist values. It is exactly these – and similar – interventions that make the book a useful contribution to current debates.

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Contributors

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Notes to Contributors

There has recently been a major development in the submission and processing of manuscripts at *Screen*. On 1 March 2009, after much discussion and in collaboration with our publisher OUP, we switched to the **Manuscript Central** online submission system. Many readers will already be familiar with this method, but for those who are not, it will in essence mean that manuscripts are submitted through the Manuscript Central site, and thereafter all communications between editorial office, author and peer reviewers will be channelled through, and logged by, the system. Our intention, in moving to this new system, is to improve efficiency and clarity in all aspects of the process: providing, and encouraging from others, a swifter response; creating an easily accessible history of a manuscript's progress; reducing the need for photocopying and printing. Authors are guided through the submission procedure with onscreen prompts and instructions; however, if you experience any difficulties or have any comments to make about using Manuscript Central, please contact our editorial office. Like any new system it may benefit from some fine-tuning, and if there is anything we can do to improve the transition we would like to know.

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1. Christian Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: the Imaginary Signifier*, trans. Celia Britton et al. (London: Macmillan, 1982).
2. Ginette Vincendeau, 'Melodramatic realism: on some French women's films in the 1930s', *Screen*, vol. 30, no. 3 (1989), pp. 51–65.
3. Monika Treut, 'Female misbehaviour', in Laura Pietrapaolo and Ada Testaferri (eds), *Feminisms in the Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 106–21.

References to *films* in both notes and main text should include full title, and in the case of non-English language films original release title should precede US and/or British release title, followed by director and release date in round brackets:

A bout de souffle/Breathless (Jean-Luc Godard, 1960)

Where such information is relevant to the argument, details of production company and/or country of origin may also be included: *The Big Sleep* (Howard Hawks, Warner Bros, US, 1945)

References to *television programmes* should be dated from the year of first transmission, and, in the case of long-running serials, the duration of the run should be indicated. Details of production company, transmitting channel, country, etc should be supplied where relevant: *Coronation Street* (Granada, 1961–)

Where writers or producers are credited their role should be indicated:

Where the Difference Begins (w. David Mercer, BBC, 1961)

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Volume 50, number 3

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Volume 50, number 1

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Volume 49, number 4

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